

MARVEL

WISDOMBROW



THE WINDING WAY

DA
RT
CK
05

BAMF! Nightcrawler's back, but for how long?!

As a badly injured Kurt lies on the brink of death, moments of his life flash before his eyes. Unfortunately, these memories are not how he remembered. Is his past a lie? Could the sins of his murderous brother be paid for by Nightcrawler? Or is Kurt actually responsible for atrocities even he finds unspeakable?! Guest-starring Wolverine!

Collecting *Nightcrawler* #7-12, written by **Roberto Aguirre-Sacasa** (*Marvel Knights 4*) and illustrated by **Darick Robertson** (*Wolverine*).



MARVEL

7

AGUIRRE-SACASA

ROBERTSON

PALMIOTTI

NIGHTCRAWLER™





FEBRUARY IN
NEW YORK.

EVERYTHING'S IN
A DEEP-FREEZE.



BUT THEN
WHY DOES IT
FEEL LIKE...?

...WHY
AM I...?



...BURNING
UP?

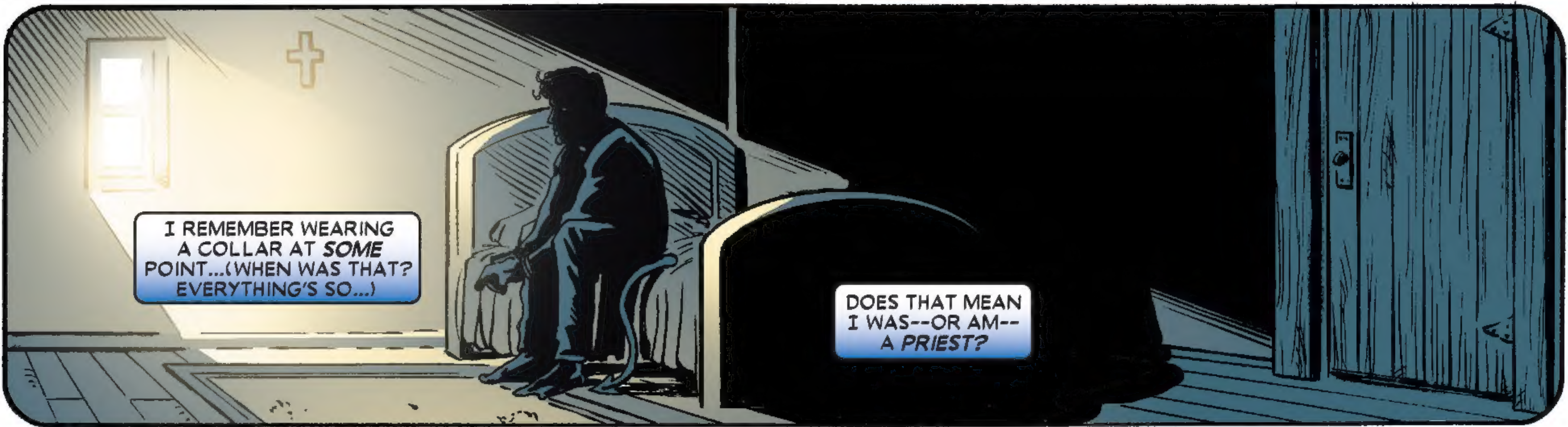
HELP AN
OLD ALTAR BOY,
FATHER?



FATHER...?

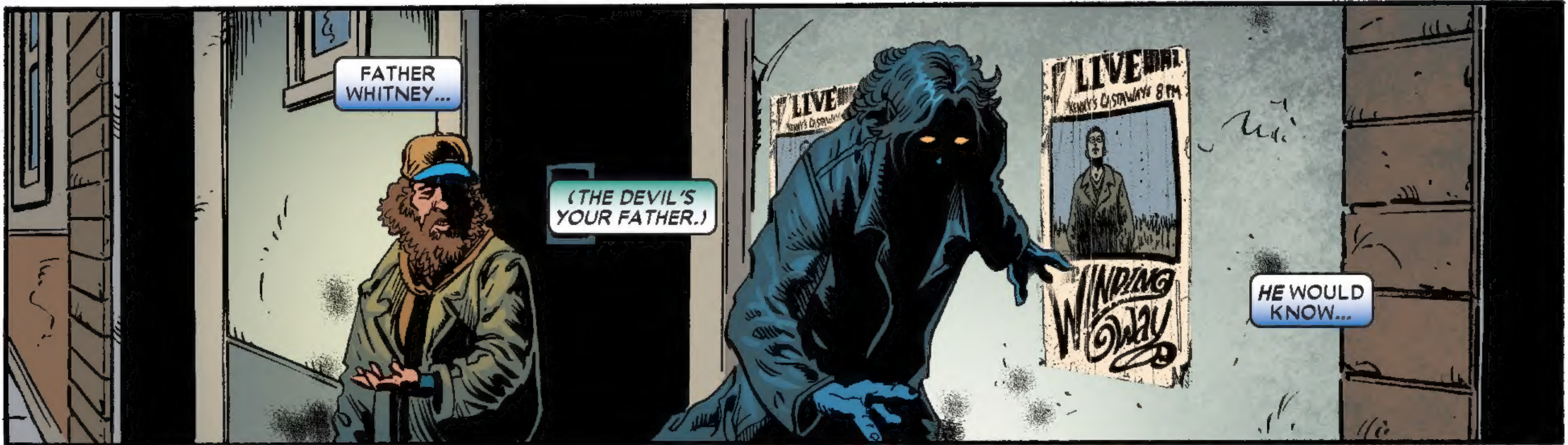
OH, NO,
I'M NOT
A...

WAIT,
AM I...?



I REMEMBER WEARING
A COLLAR AT **SOME**
POINT...(WHEN WAS THAT?
EVERYTHING'S SO...)

DOES THAT MEAN
I WAS--OR AM--
A PRIEST?



FATHER
WHITNEY...

(THE DEVIL'S
YOUR FATHER.)

HE WOULD
KNOW...

THIS CHURCH...
I NEED...

(...TO CONFESS
YOUR SINS...)

...TO GET
WARM...

(...TO PRAY FOR
FORGIVENESS...)

...I NEED
HELP...

THE WINDING WAY PART 1 OF 4 UNDERBELLY

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THE TIME OF
DAY...IS
SOMEONE
HEARING...?

...HEARING
PEOPLE'S
CONFESSIONS?



IS
IT...?
CAN
I GO IN,
MOTHER?



HE'S BEEN
WAITING FOR
YOU...



WHY CAN'T I
STOP SHAKING?
WHAT'S--?

MAY GOD, WHO
HAS ENLIGHTENED
EVERY HEART, HELP YOU
TO KNOW YOUR SINS
AND TRUST IN HIS
MERCY.



AY...

AMEN.

FORGIVE
ME, FATHER, FOR
I HAVE SINNED. IT
HAS BEEN...

...



...I DON'T
KNOW HOW
LONG IT'S BEEN
SINCE MY LAST
CONFESSION.

I CAN'T
REMEMBER...

(ANYTHING.)

...HOW
I GOT
HERE...



IF IT'S
EASIER FOR
YOU, MY
SON, START
WITH...

WHEN
HAVE YOU FELT
FURTHEST FROM
YOUR GOD?

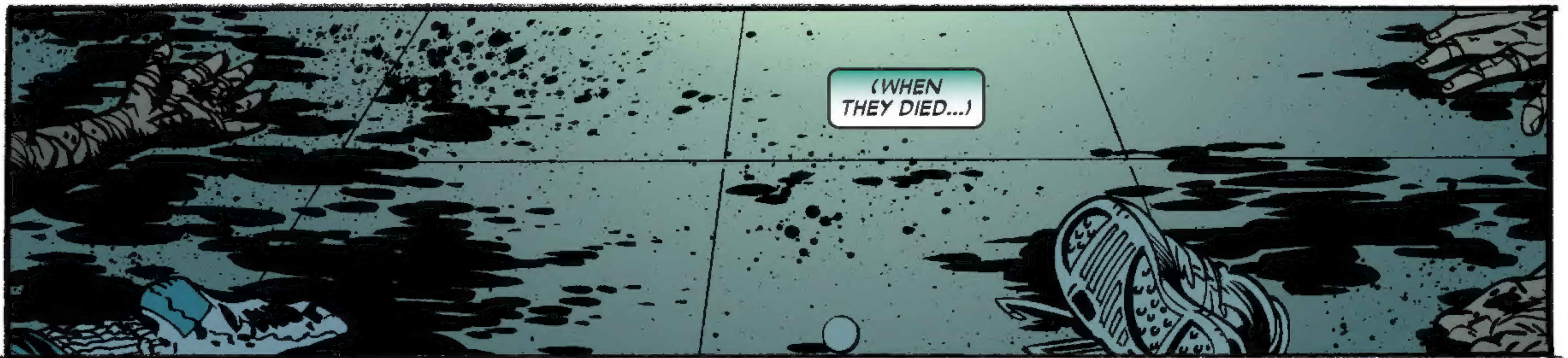


FURTHEST
FROM...?

(WHEN YOU
WERE...)



THE
CHILDREN...



(WHEN
THEY DIED...)

WAS IT WHEN YOU LET THE
CHILDREN DIE? WHEN YOU
DIDN'T *PROTECT* THEM?



BUT
I DID,
I...



...I SAVED
SETH FROM CHILDS
AND HIS CULT. I
STOPPED THEM FROM
HURTING ANY OTHER
CHILDREN...

OH, I
DON'T MEAN
THOSE LITTLE
ONES...



...I MEAN
THE ONES YOUR
BROTHER
MURDERED...

WHAT?
HOW DO
YOU--?



...BEFORE
YOU MURDERED
HIM.

NO,
I--

THAT
VOICE...



IT'S
NOT FATHER
WHITNEY'S...



MEIN GOTT,
I KNOW WHO
IT IS, IT'S...



...EMPTY?

(BECAUSE
WHITNEY'S DEAD.
HE'S BEEN DEAD
FOR--)

BUT...BUT
WHO
WAS I...?

(THE DEVIL..)



WHAT'S...WHAT'S
HAPPENING TO ME?

(THE DEVIL
IS PLAYING
WITH YOU...)



IT'S THIS FEVER,
MAKING ME...

(...DRIVING
YOU INSANE...)



IT'S JUST
BEGINNING,
YOU KNOW.

WHAT...
WHAT IS?

(YOUR
TORMENT.)



...
...I'M
SORRY?

WHAT'S
JUST BEGINNING?
YOU JUST SAID--



I
HAVEN'T SAID
ANYTHING.

BUT...

FORGET
THIS, JUST
GO. JUST--



--GET OUTSIDE.

BETTER. THIS IS MUCH, MUCH--



HEY, FREAK.

WHO...?

(THEY HATE YOU.)



WHO LET YOU OUTTA YOUR CAGE, FREAK?

I'M NOT...

BUT I DO REMEMBER BEING IN A...



WHEN WAS THAT?

WHY WAS THAT?

(BECAUSE YOU'RE A--)

--TALKING TO YOU, FREAK.





OH, NO...

TURN AROUND,
KURT. DON'T
LET THEM--



--HUH?
WHERE DID
THEY--



THUDD!

--UHNFF!

HOW--?



ALL AROUND
ME. THEY'RE--

OH, GOD--



--THEY'RE
GOING TO--

AAARRR!



MY RIBS...

DID ONE
JUST BREAK?

THINK,
KURT.

YOU NEED
TO GET OUT
OF HERE.
YOU NEED--



--HELP?

?????????



HELLO,
YOUNG
MAN.

MY NAME IS
CHARLES XAVIER
AND I'D LIKE TO
MAKE YOU AN
OFFER.



PROFESSOR...?



NO, SOMEONE...



YOU'RE LETTING
THOSE **MONKEYS** KILL
YOU? WHEN YOU COULD
TEAR THEM TO SHREDS
WITH YOUR **BARE**, THREE-
FINGERED HANDS?

...MYSTIQUE?



...MOTHER?

THEY'RE
KILLING ME,
MOTHER...

(LET
THEM.)



OR--SINCE
YOU'RE SO SENSITIVE
AND GENTLE--YOU
COULD, I SUPPOSE,
SAVE YOURSELF BY
TELEPORTING.

YOU'RE
GOOD FOR THAT,
AT LEAST.



I'M...?

A
TELEPORTER.

I
CAN...?



...TEACH YOU HOW
TO USE YOUR SPECIAL
TALENTS AND
PERFECT THEM.

I RUN A
SCHOOL FOR
GIFTED YOUNGSTERS
SUCH AS YOURSELF,
WHERE YOU'LL BE
ABLE TO--

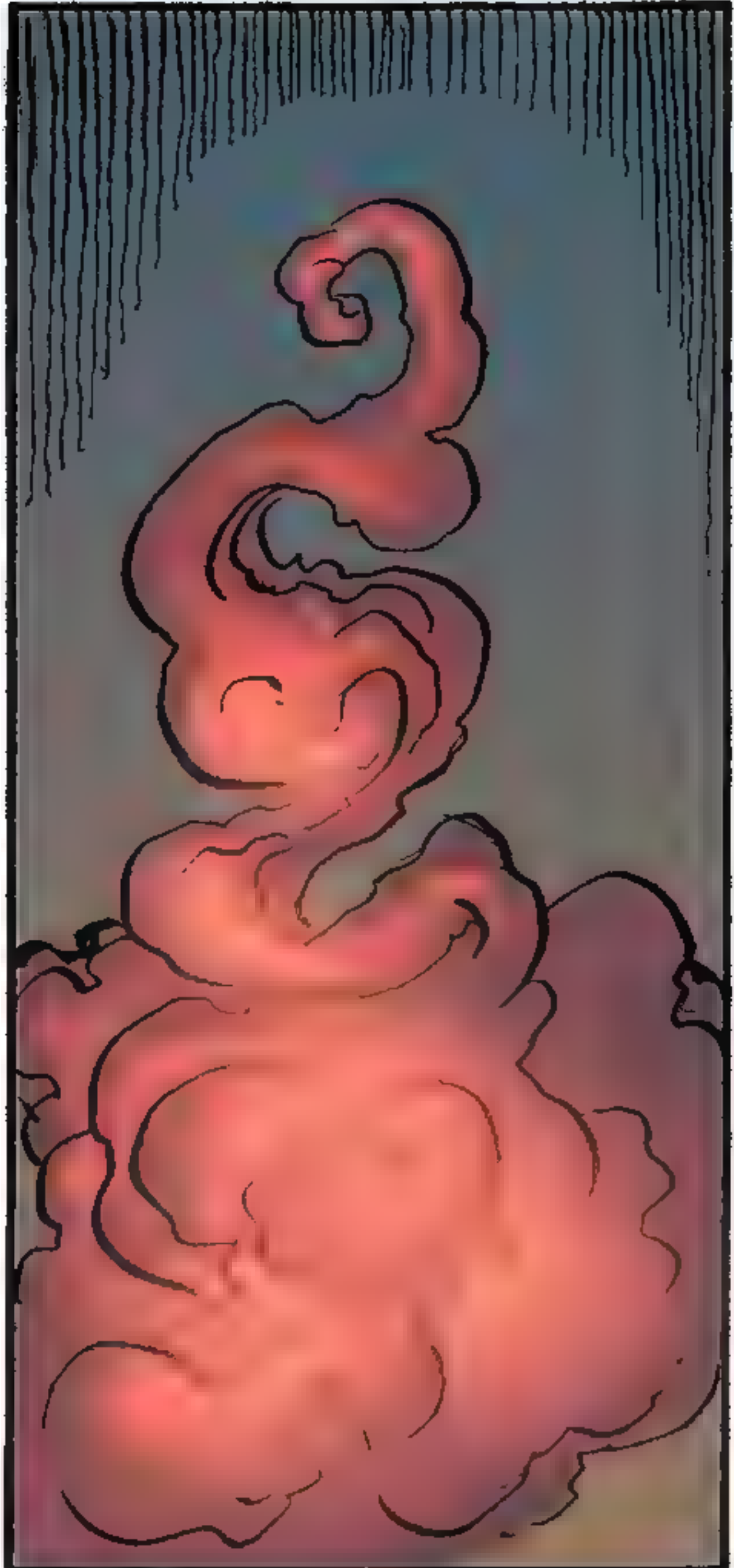


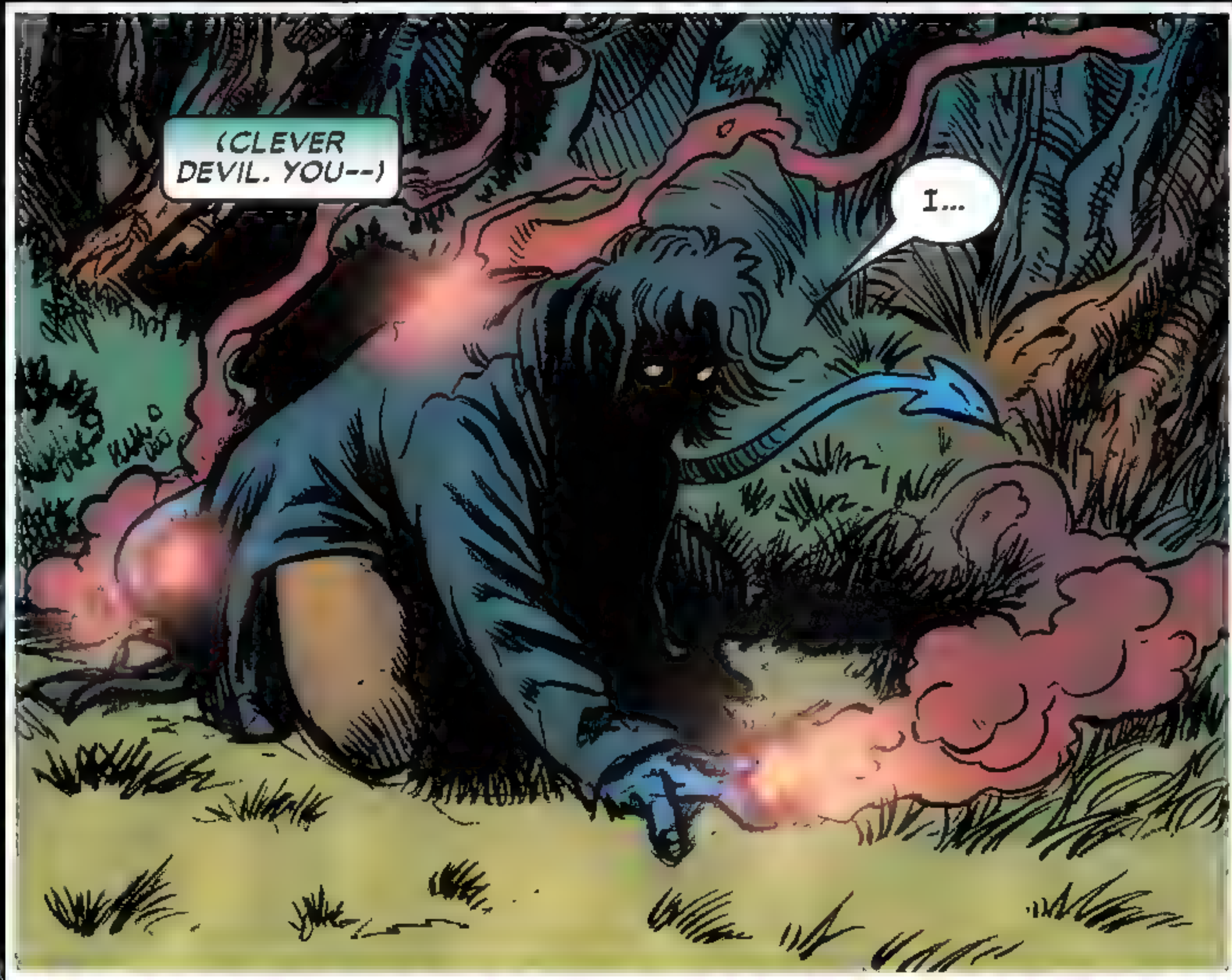
--IMAGINE
A PLACE AND
GO THERE.



VANISH
IN A--

BAM!





(CLEVER
DEVIL. YOU--)

I...



WAIT, I...

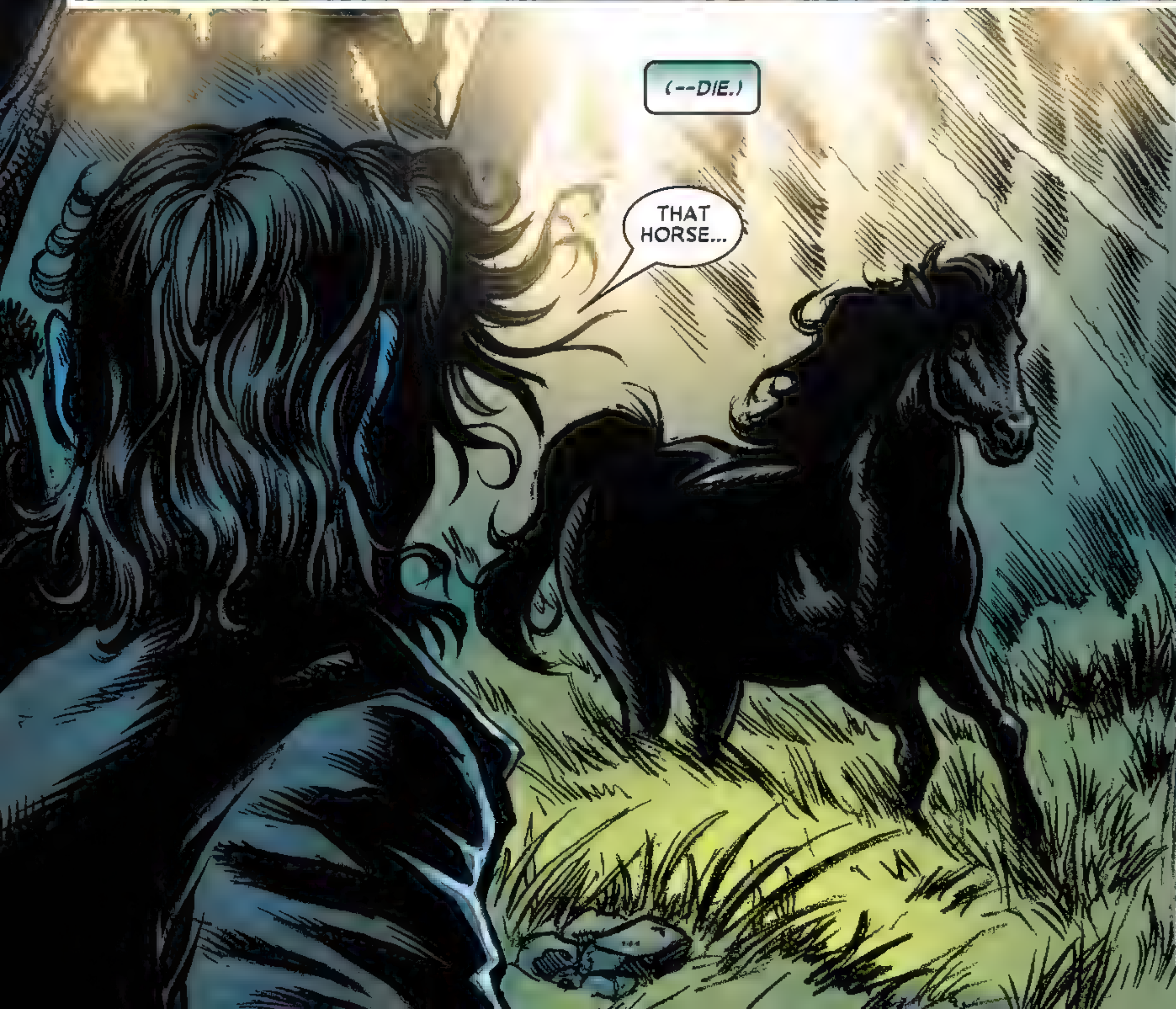
...I KNOW
THIS PLACE.
IT'S...



(THE DARK
COUNTRY.)

GERMANY.
WHERE I
WAS...

(WHERE
YOU WILL--)

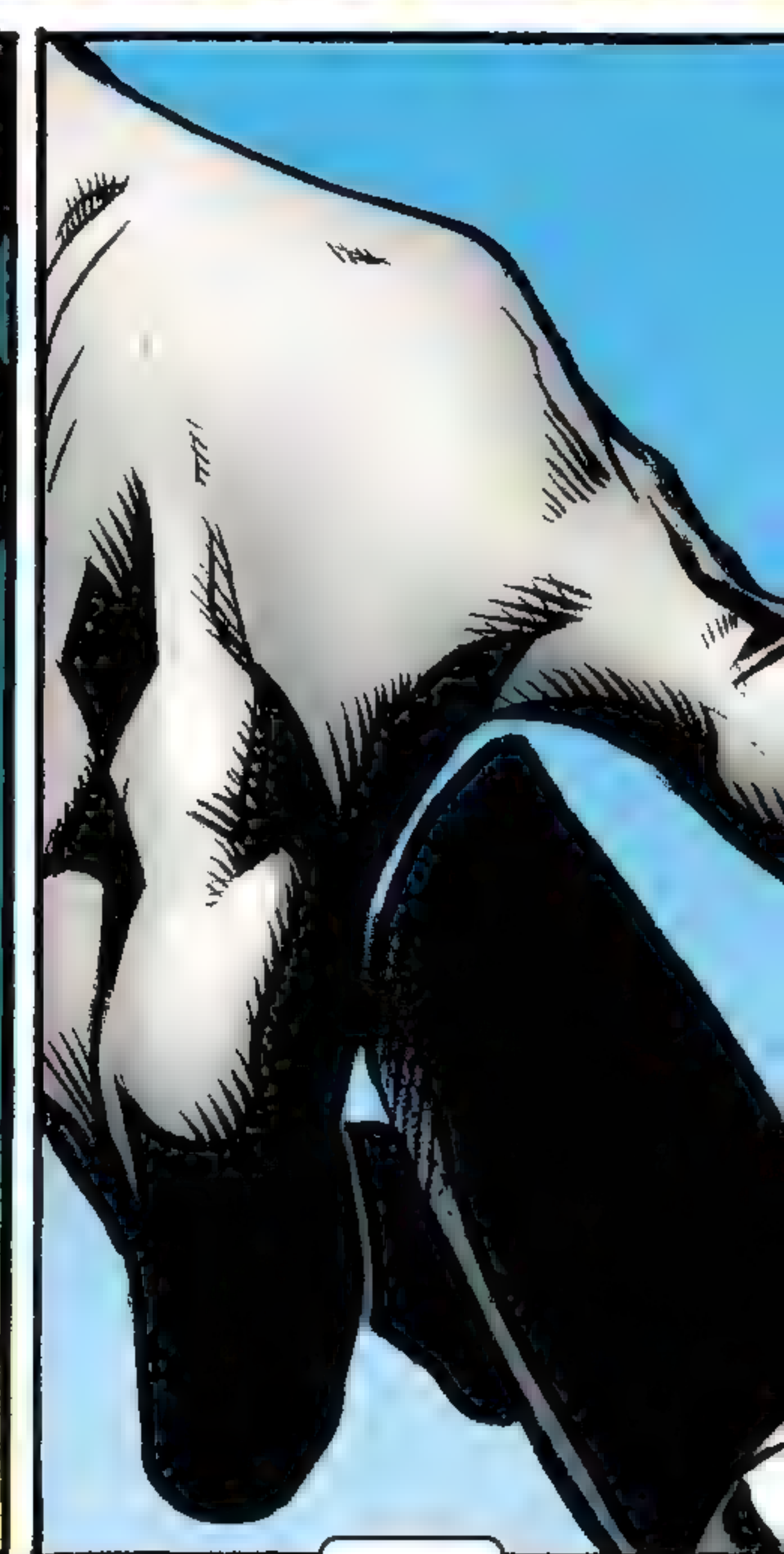
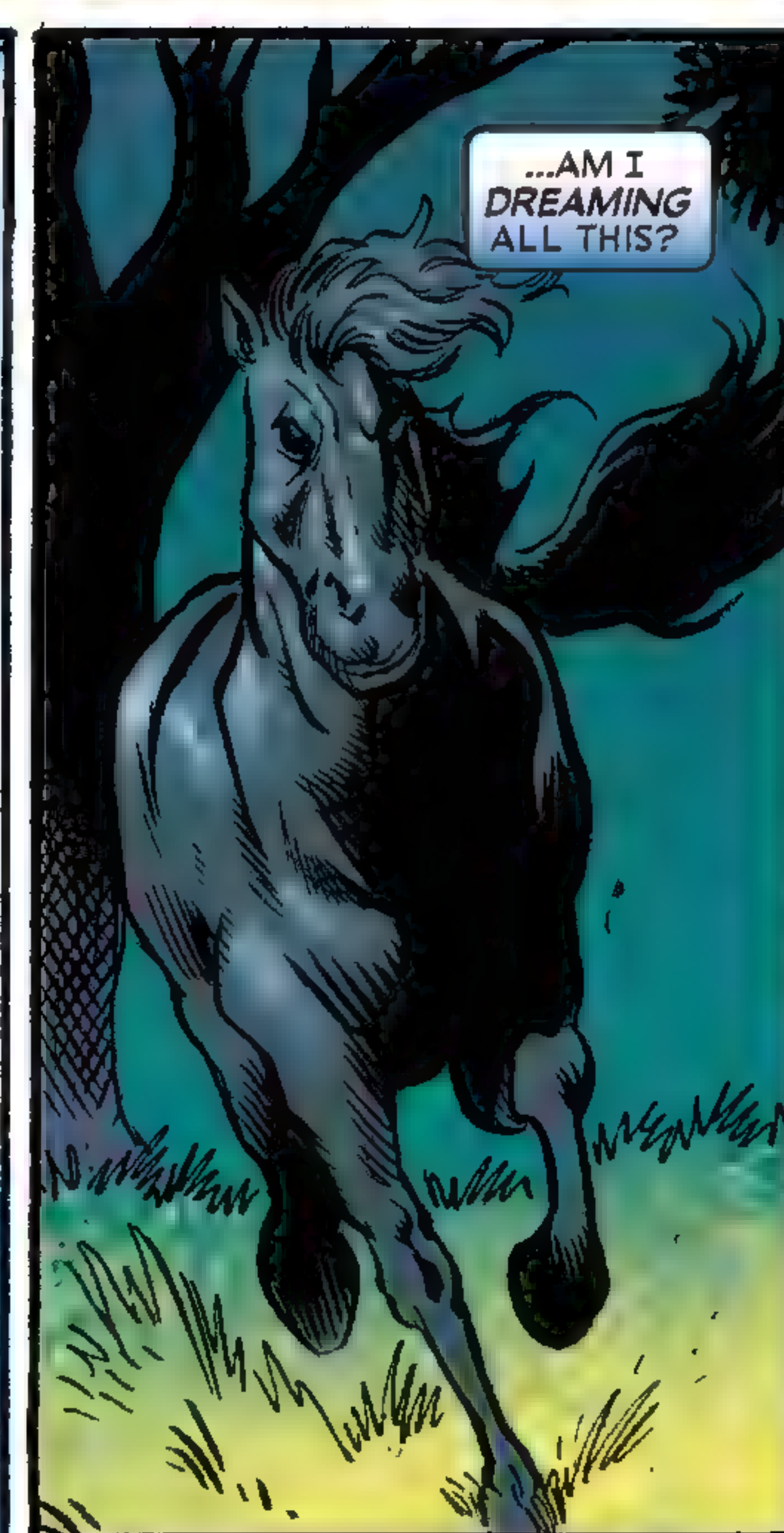


(--DIE.)

THAT
HORSE...

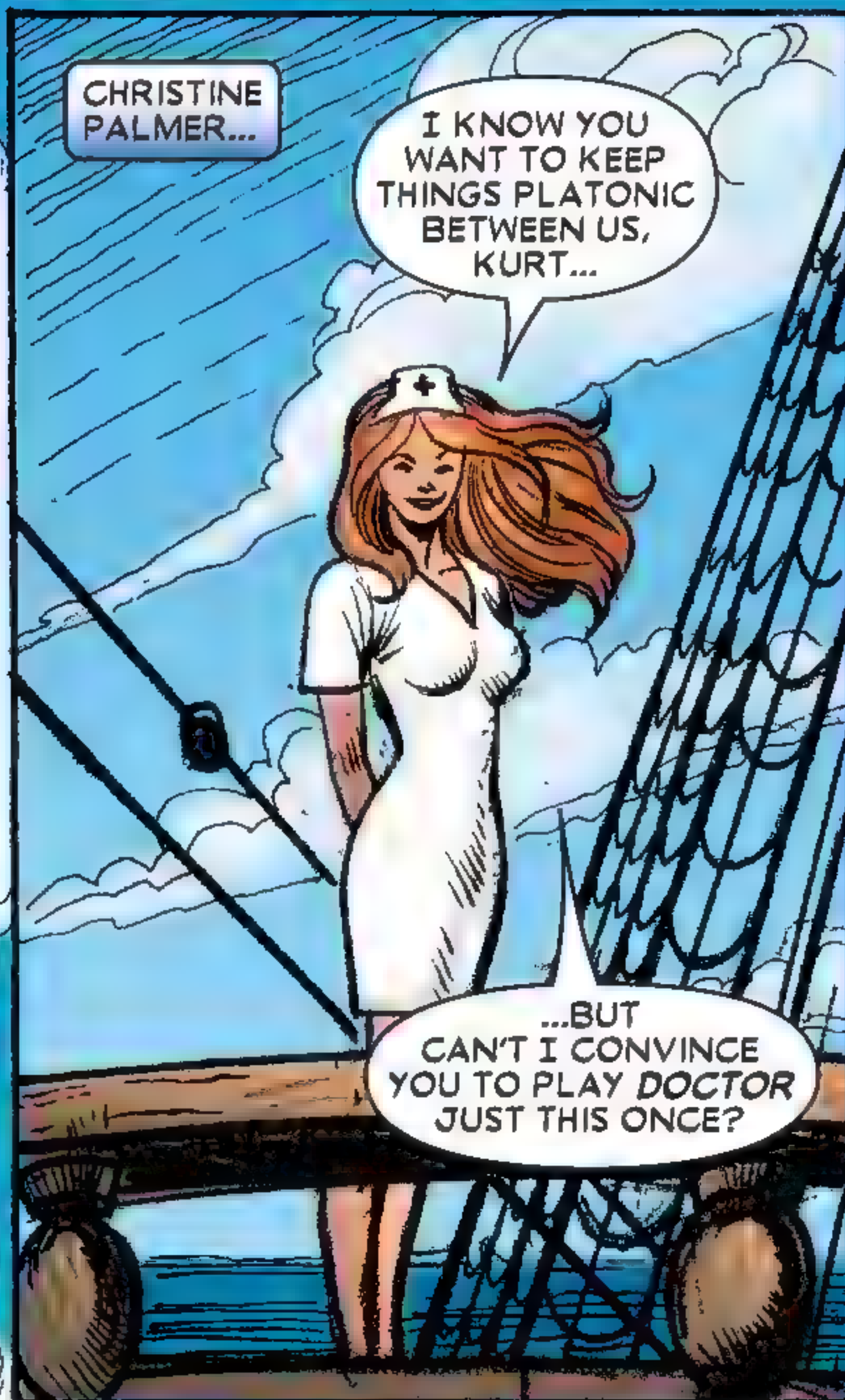


LEADING
ME TO...





LOVER? THAT
MUST BE--



CHRISTINE
PALMER...

I KNOW YOU
WANT TO KEEP
THINGS PLATONIC
BETWEEN US,
KURT...

...BUT
CAN'T I CONVINCE
YOU TO PLAY DOCTOR
JUST THIS ONCE?



ORORO...

AS TWO OF
THE X-MEN'S MOST
SENIOR MEMBERS, WE
REALLY *SHOULDN'T*
BE SNEAKING AROUND
IN THE MIDDLE OF THE
NIGHT LIKE SMITTEN
SCHOOLCHILDREN,
BUT STILL...



AMANDA...

WELL, WHICH
IS IT? AM I YOUR
SISTER OR YOUR
GIRLFRIEND? OR
BOTH?

AND, BY THE
WAY, CONSIDERING
WHAT *YOU'RE* WEARING,
MAKING FUN OF OTHER
PEOPLE'S COSTUMES IS
NO LONGER AN
OPTION.

WHAT I'M--



--OH, RIGHT.

SHIVER ME
TIMBERS AND
ALL THAT--



--LADIES?

ONE SPINS
THE THREAD OF
LIFE, ONE DECIDES
ITS LENGTH,
ONE CUTS THE
STRAND...



IS THAT MY...?

(NOW DO YOU FEEL IT? ITS HOT BREATH ON YOUR NECK?)



YOUR OVERDUE DEATH.

NO REPRIEVE THIS TIME.

BEHIND YOU.

SNIP!

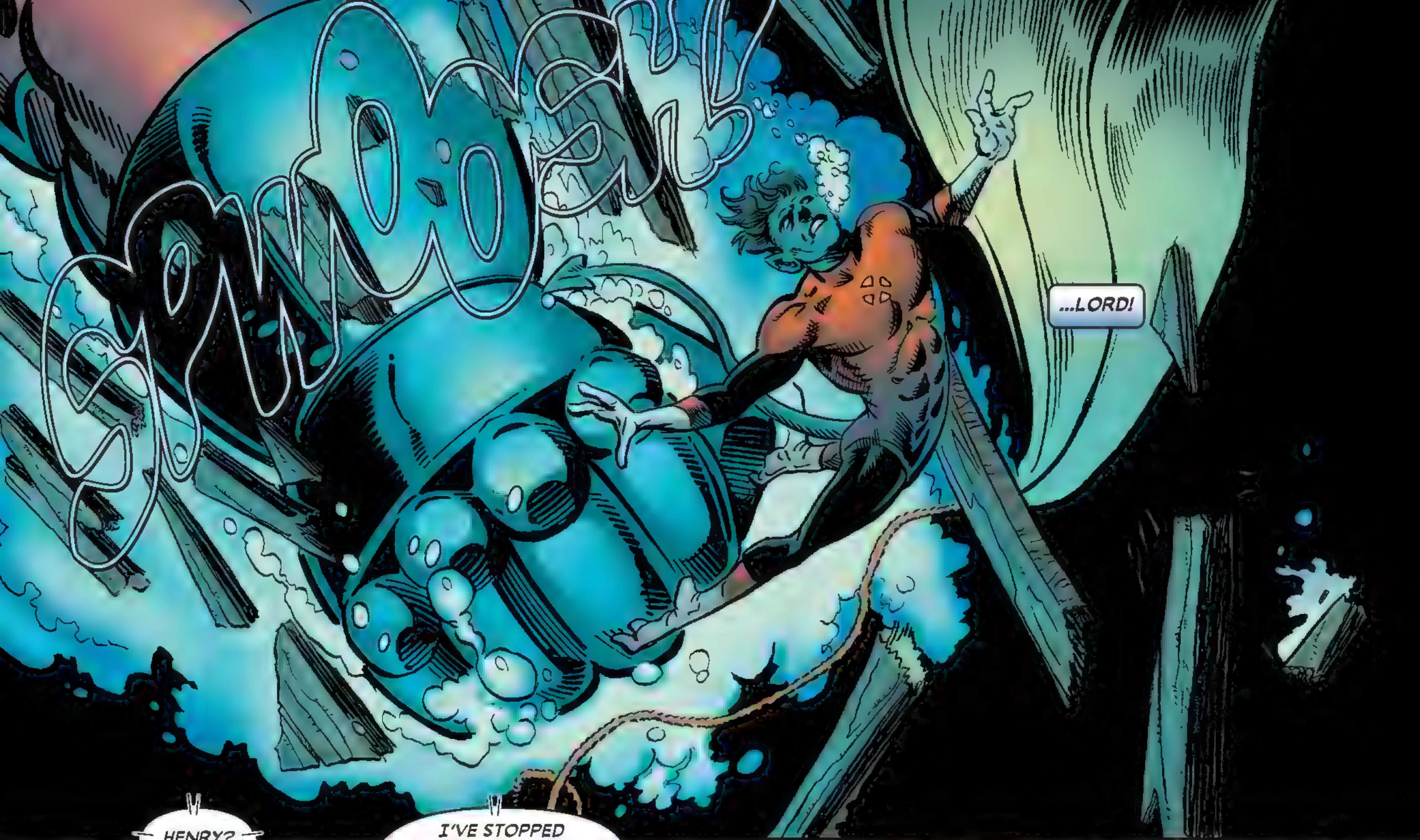


BEHIND---?

OH...



...MY...



...LORD!



HENRY?

I'VE STOPPED
THE BLEEDING, EMMA,
BUT HIS PULSE IS RACING,
HIS TEMPERATURE'S 107,
AND HIS VITALS--



THE OCEAN--
THE WATER--
SHOULD BE
COLD, BUT IT'S
BOILING...



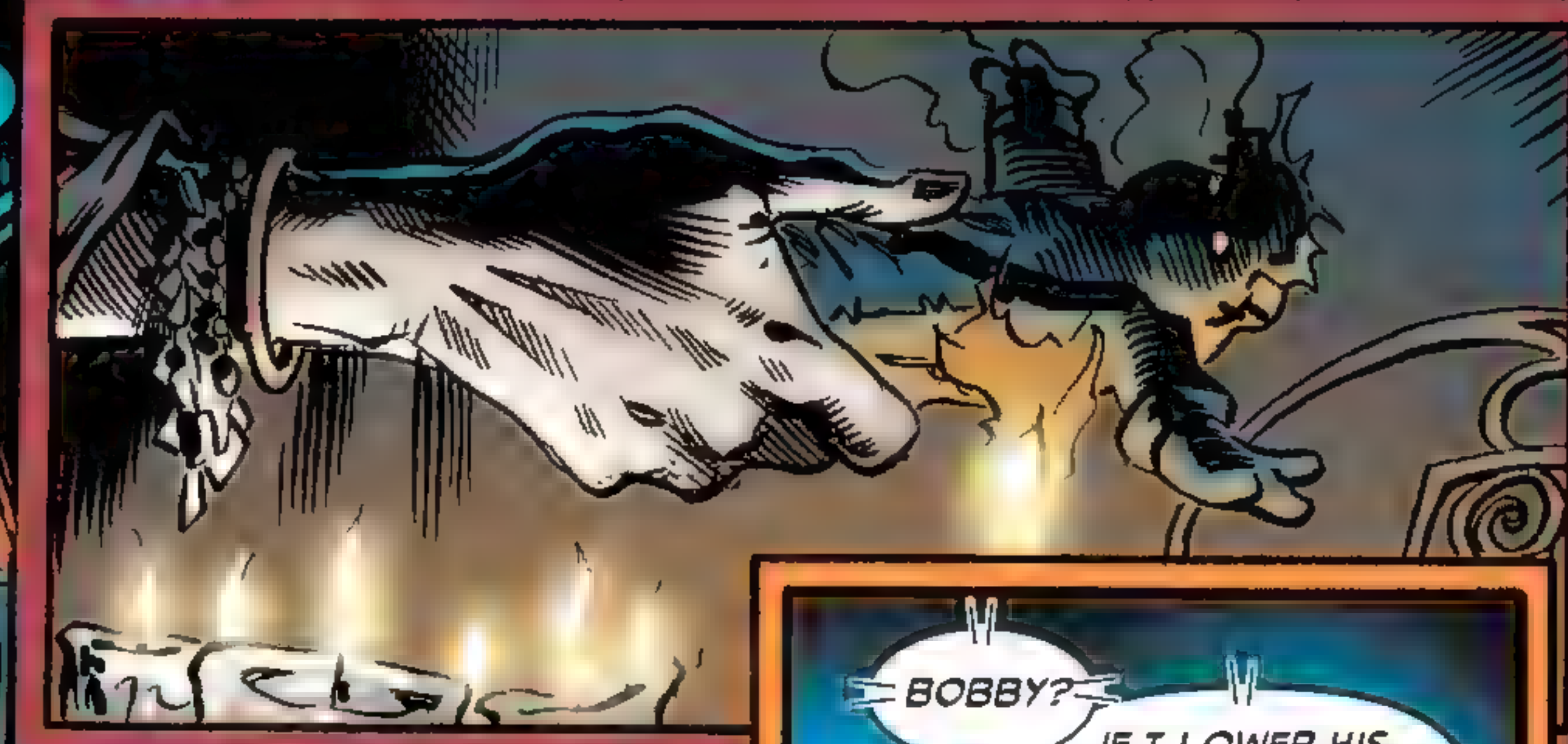
VERMIN'S
CLAWS WERE
POISONED.
WITH A TOXIN
THAT'S--

DR.
MCCOY--

--KURT'S
BRAIN IS
SEIZING--

OH, GOD--

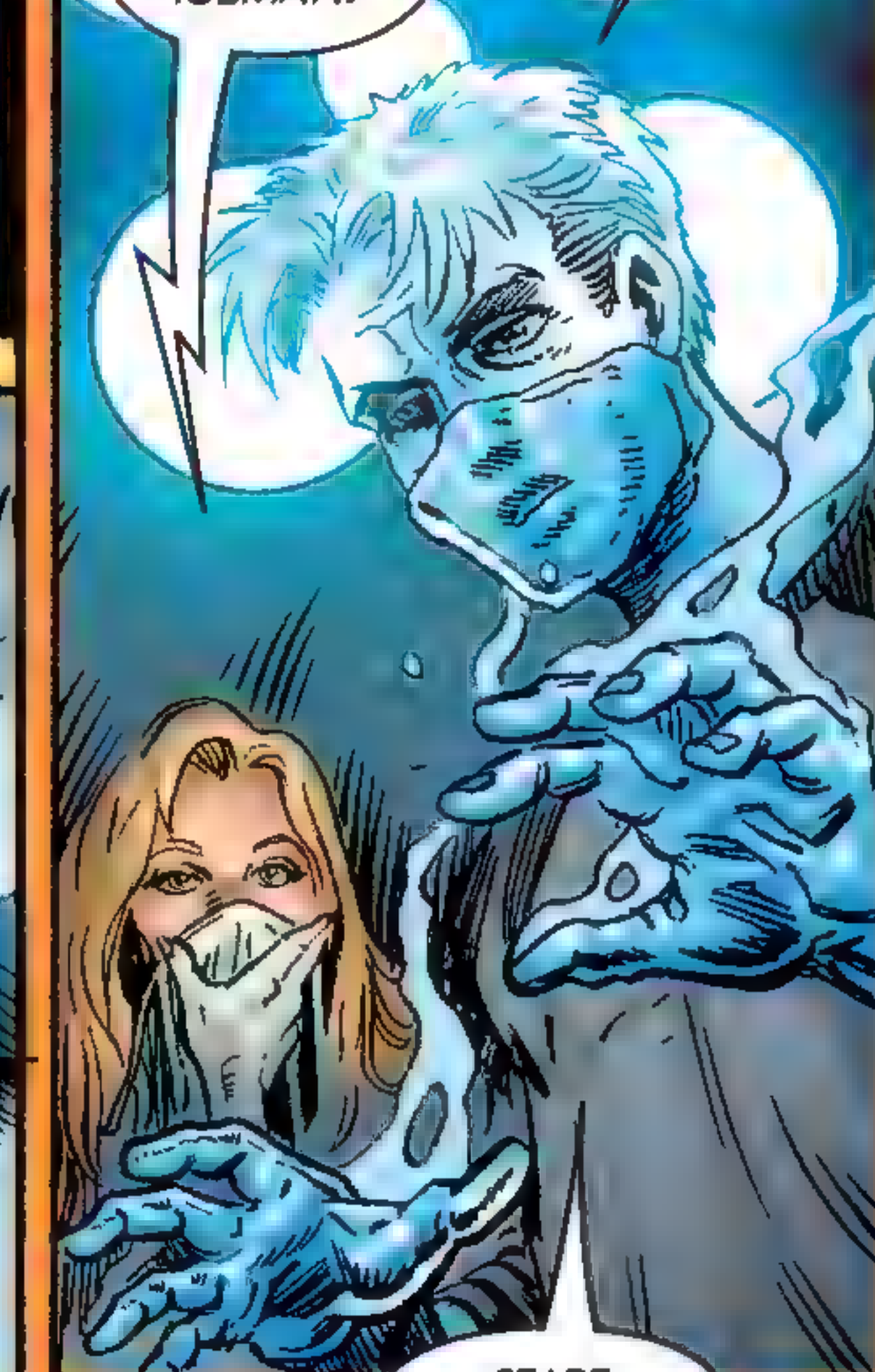
--LIKE A HOT
IRON IN MY--



BOBBY?

IF I LOWER HIS
BODY TEMPERATURE
TOO FAST, HE'LL GO
INTO SHOCK--

--THEN
YOU'D BEST
BE CAREFUL,
ICEMAN.



START
THINKING COOL
THOUGHTS,
BUDDY...

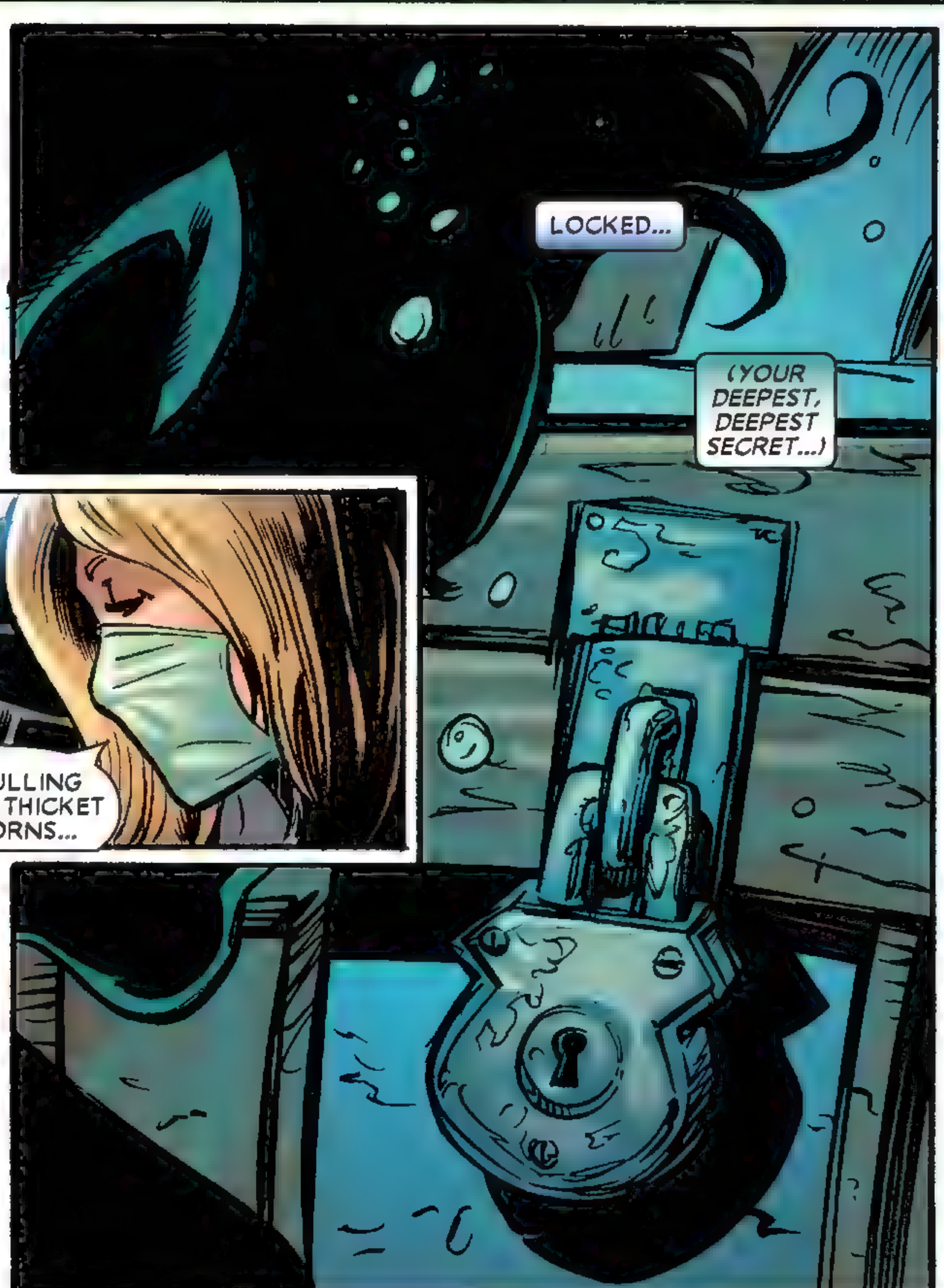


BETTER...

THE DEEPER I
GO, THE COOLER
THE WATER...

...WAIT A
MINUTE,
WHAT'S...?





(...THE ONLY
THING THAT
MIGHT SAVE
YOU.)

I CAN OPEN
THIS, I THINK...

EVEN IF
NONE OF THIS
IS REAL--

(OH, IT IS.)

--I CAN
IMAGINE
A KEY...

...AND THEN HAVE
ONE APPEAR IN MY...

(AND THE DEVIL
WAS GIVEN THE KEYS
TO THE KINGDOM...)

WHATEVER I'M
MEANT TO FIND,
I'LL JUST--

THAT'S
ENOUGH,
KURT.

EMMA...?

DARLING.

I'VE COME
TO BRING YOU BACK
FROM...WHATEVER DARK
CORNER OF YOUR
SUBCONSCIOUS YOU'VE
RETREATED TO.

I DON'T
UNDERSTAND...

YOU
WERE ATTACKED
BY THAT
THING CALLED
VERMIN.

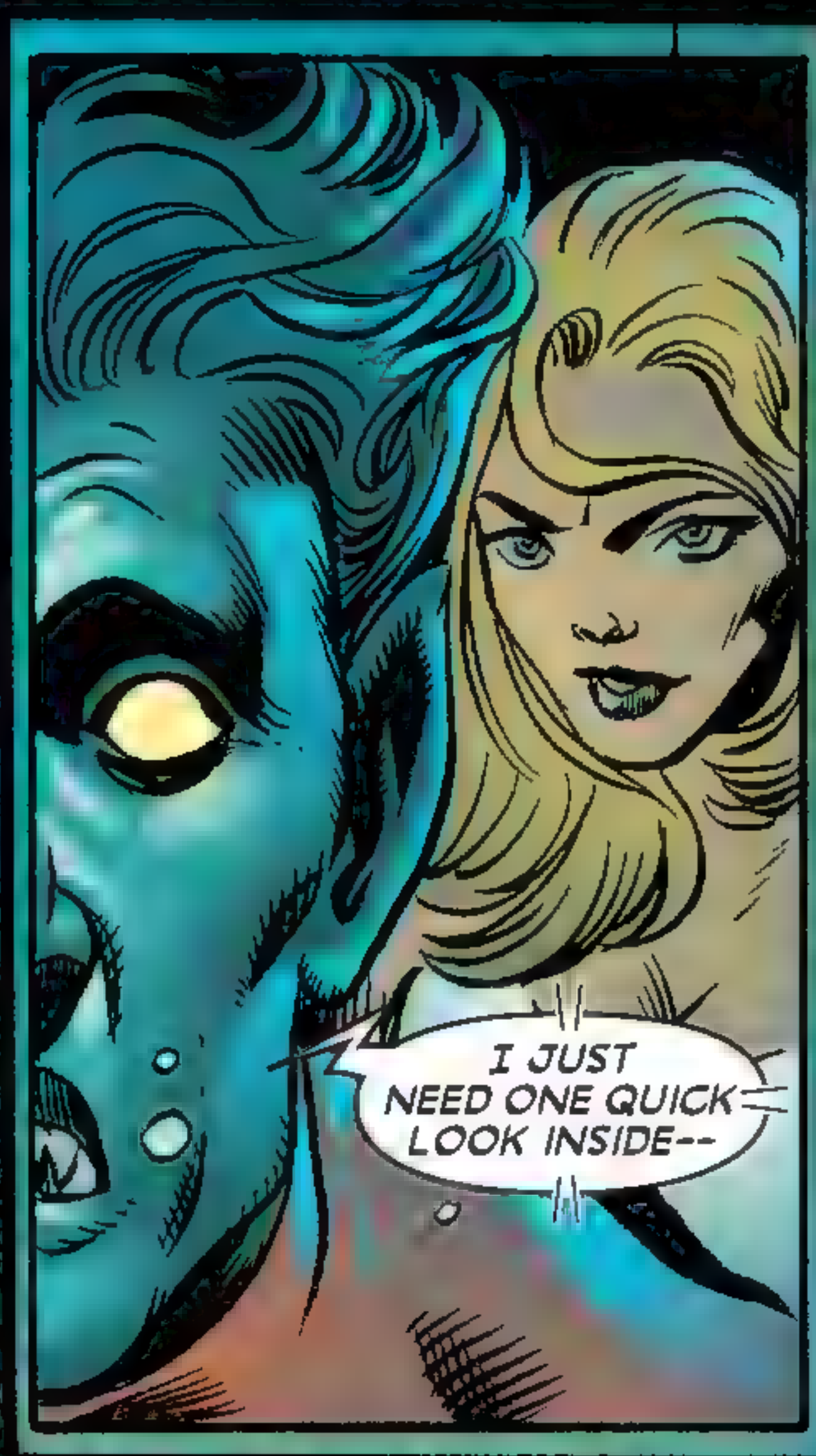
HENRY'S BEEN
OPERATING ON
YOU, THE DEAR, BUT
YOU SUCCUMBED TO A COMA...



SO I'M REACHING INTO YOUR MIND AND DRAGGING YOU BACK...

ALL RIGHT, BUT THAT TRUNK--

NO, LISTEN TO ME--IF YOU DON'T WAKE UP NOW, YOU MAY NEVER WAKE UP.



I JUST NEED ONE QUICK LOOK INSIDE--



KURT, DARLING, I'M TRYING TO SAVE YOUR LIFE HERE AND YOU'RE ANNOYING ME...

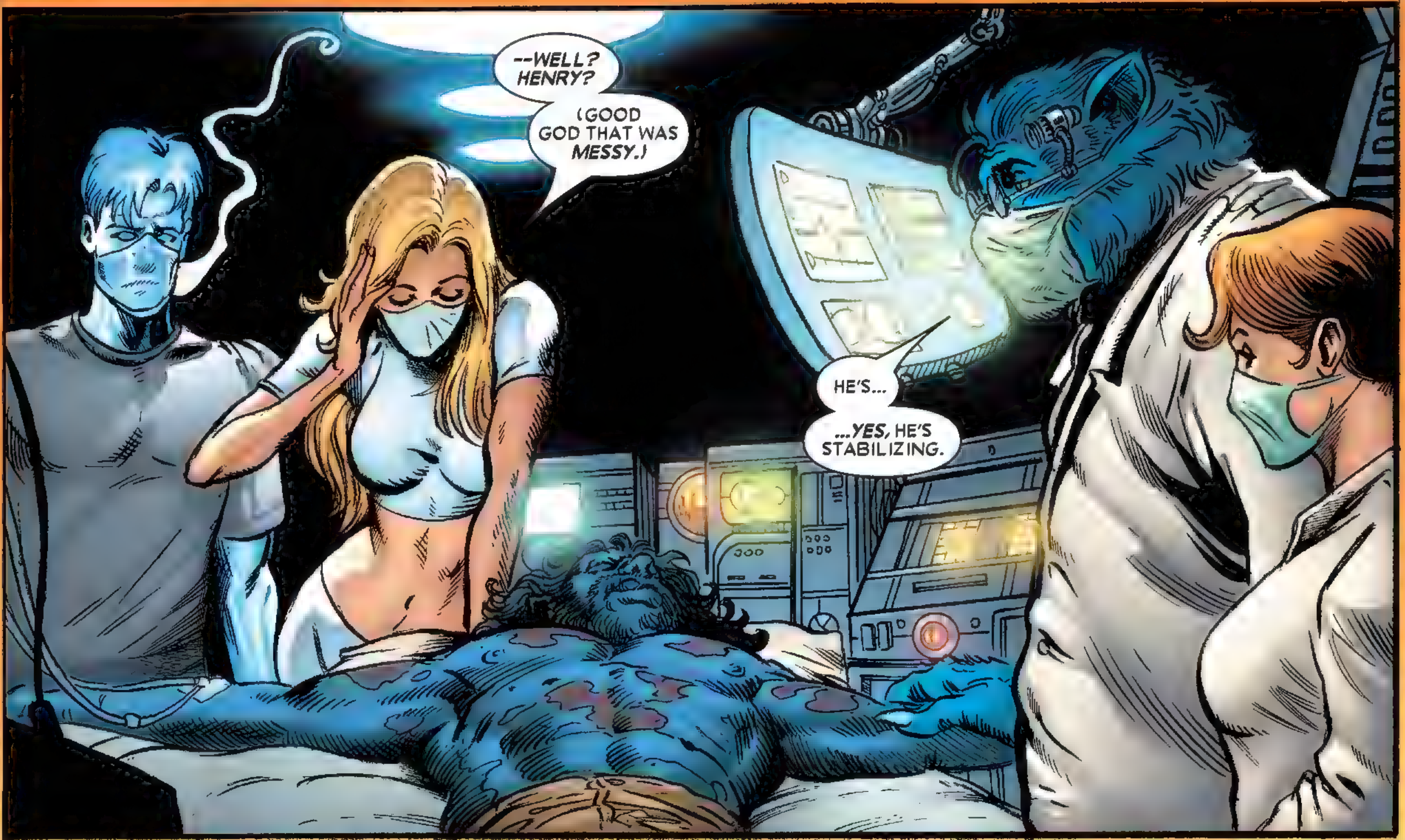
EMMA--!

WE'LL FINISH THIS DISCUSSION ONCE YOU'RE CONSCIOUS.

NOW CALM DOWN, WOULD YOU? I'M GOING TO EASE YOU BACK TO--



NO!

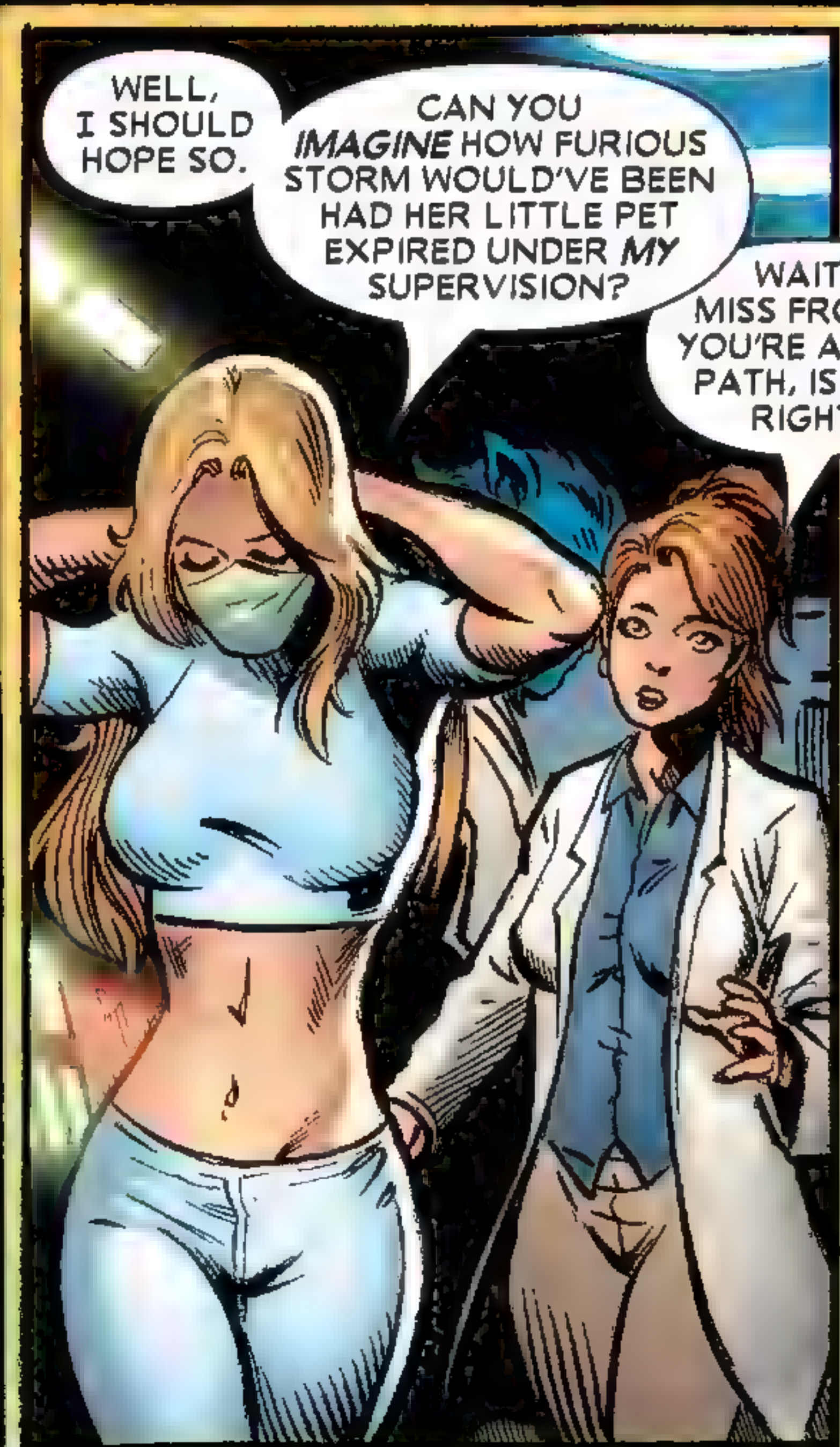


--WELL?
HENRY?

(GOOD
GOD THAT WAS
MESSY.)

HE'S...

...YES, HE'S
STABILIZING.



WELL,
I SHOULD
HOPE SO.

CAN YOU
IMAGINE HOW FURIOUS
STORM WOULD'VE BEEN
HAD HER LITTLE PET
EXPIRED UNDER MY
SUPERVISION?

WAIT--
MISS FROST--
YOU'RE A TELE-
PATH, IS THAT
RIGHT?



HM? I AM,
YES.

WHAT WAS
IN THERE? WHAT
DID YOU SEE?



THE USUAL
FLOTSAM AND
JETSAM...CONFUSION,
ANXIETY, FEAR,
DISTRESS...

OH,
KURT...

NOT TO
WORRY, DEAR.
I KEPT HIM FROM
GETTING TOO CLOSE
TO ANY ONE
PARTICULAR PIECE
OF PSYCHOLOGICAL
BAGGAGE.

"IN FACT, BY
THE TIME POOR
KURT RECOVERS...

"...HE PROBABLY WON'T
REMEMBER THERE WAS ANY-
THING TO *FRET* ABOUT."

⊗NEXT: THINGS GET WORSE.



8

AGUIRRE-SACASA

ROBERTSON

PALMIOTTI

SA

TM



He's your best friend *and* the monster that lives under your bed! And he must go where the other X-Men won't—into the shadows that have always called to him!

PREVIOUSLY

NIGHTCRAWLER

"THE WINDING WAY"

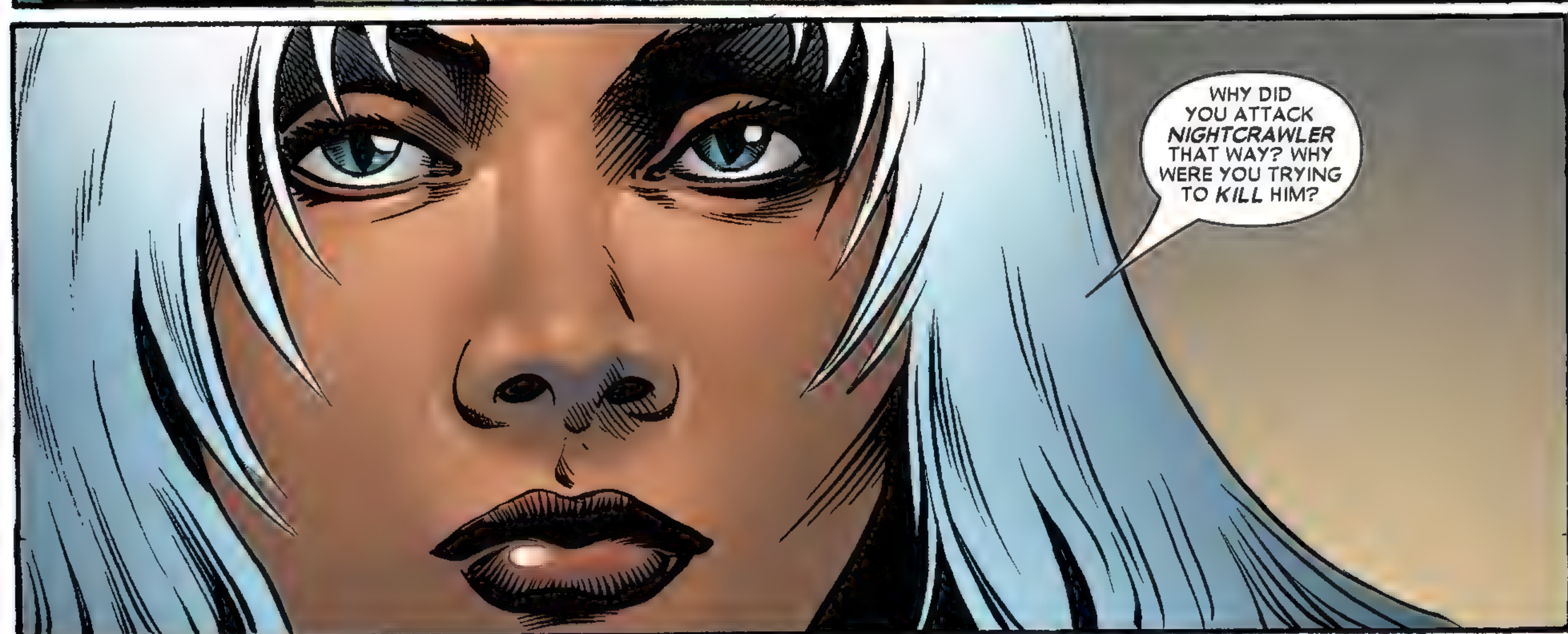


Strange and mysterious have been the days of KURT WAGNER, a.k.a. the X-MAN, NIGHTCRAWLER. Kurt was trapped in an elaborate dreamworld where his entire past came back to haunt him. From his days in the German circus, to being chased in the streets by a mob, even to his days as an X-Man...no part of his past was left untouched.

Meanwhile, in the real world, the X-Men scrambled to save Kurt's life. Kurt was attacked by the monster VERMIN, and while Kurt was dreaming, his body was dying from the beast's toxin.

Back in Kurt's dream, he descended into the ocean and came upon a chest—a chest that contained his deepest secret. Kurt attempted to open it, but before he could, Headmistress of the X-Men EMMA FROST was able to get inside Kurt's mind and free him from his mental prison.

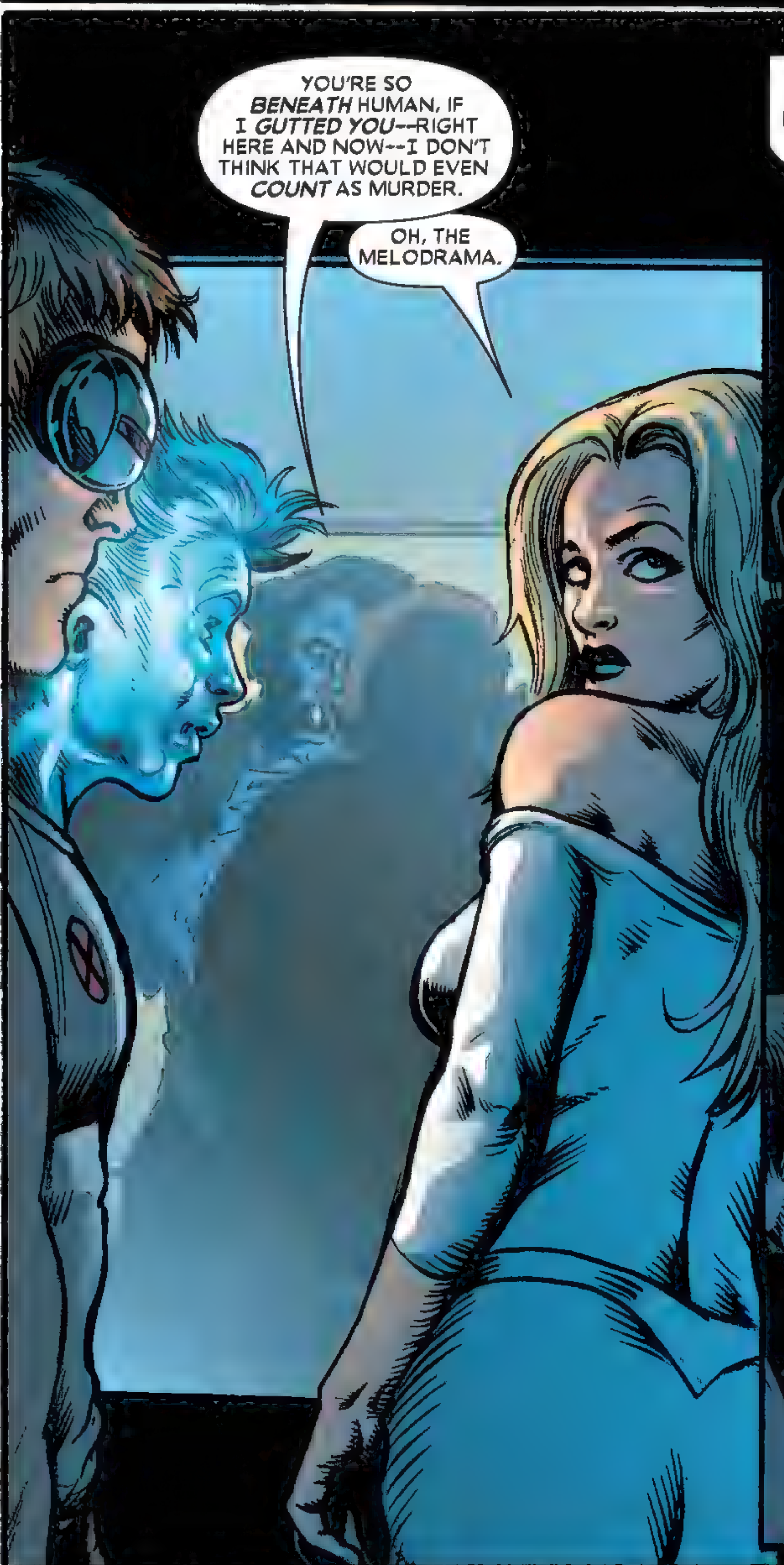
Now, with Vermin caught, Kurt, WOLVERINE, and Kurt's "is she-or isn't she" girlfriend, CHRISTIE PALMER, have traveled to Germany, to discover more about Kurt's past and perhaps discover Kurt's deepest secret...





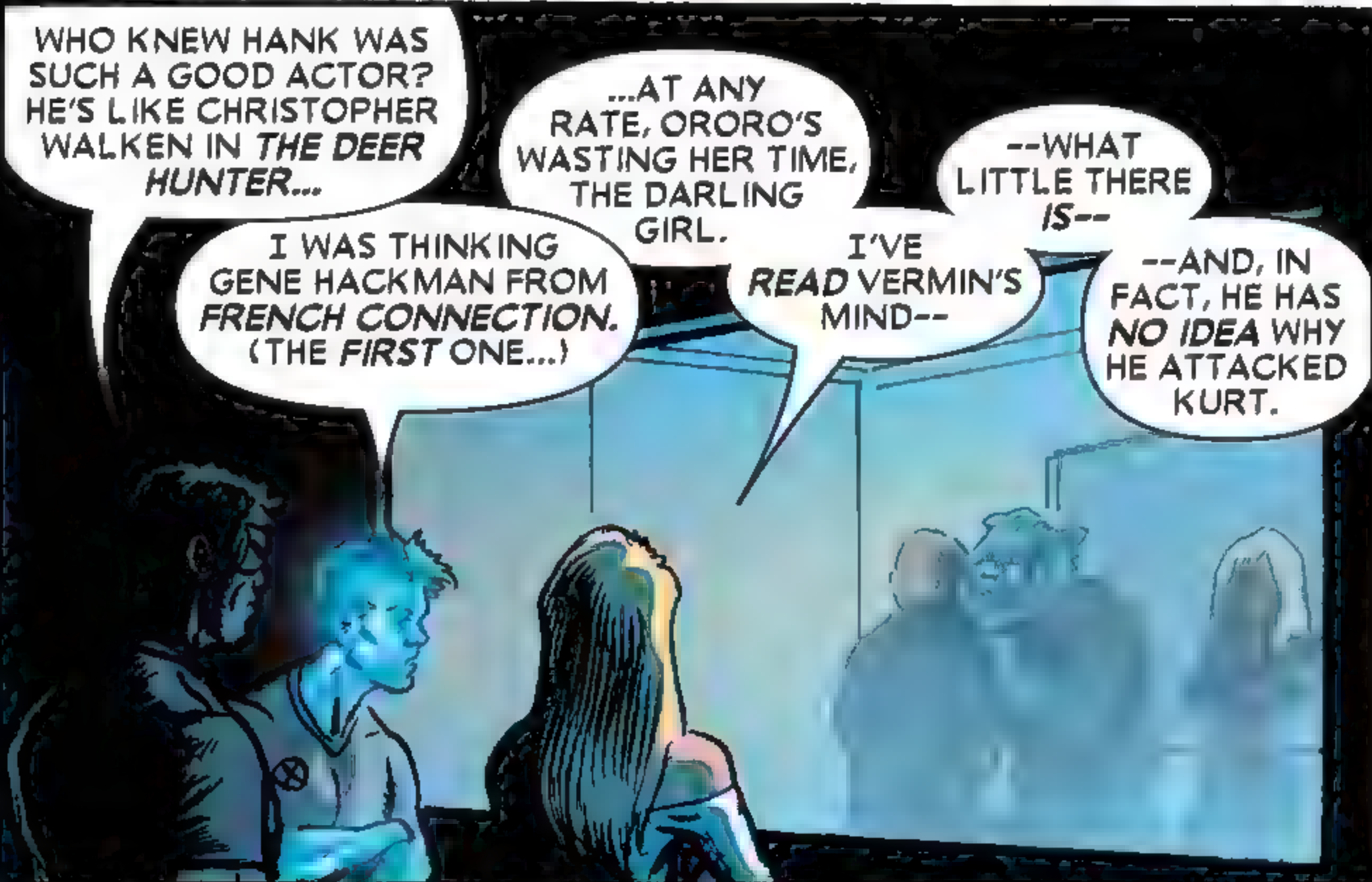
RRARRR!!

YOU'RE
THE **SICKEST**, MOST
APTLY NAMED
MONSTER I KNOW,
VERMIN!



YOU'RE SO
BENEATH HUMAN, IF
I **GUTTED** YOU--RIGHT
HERE AND NOW--I DON'T
THINK THAT WOULD EVEN
COUNT AS MURDER.

OH, THE
MELODRAMA.



WHO KNEW HANK WAS
SUCH A GOOD ACTOR?
HE'S LIKE CHRISTOPHER
WALKEN IN *THE DEER
HUNTER*...

...AT ANY
RATE, ORORO'S
WASTING HER TIME,
THE DARLING
GIRL.

--WHAT
LITTLE THERE
IS--

I WAS THINKING
GENE HACKMAN FROM
FRENCH CONNECTION.
(THE FIRST ONE...)

I'VE
READ VERMIN'S
MIND--

--AND, IN
FACT, HE HAS
NO IDEA WHY
HE ATTACKED
KURT.



'SPLAIN,
POR FAVOR?

IT'S A **MESS**
IN THERE, ROBERT,
LIKE A TEEMING MASS
OF COCKROACHES...BUT
VERMIN **BARELY**
REMEMBERS BEING IN
NEW YORK, LET ALONE
AMBUSHING KURT AND
HIS LITTLE GIRL-
FRIEND.

ACTUALLY, TECHNICALLY
SPEAKING, I DON'T THINK
KURT AND CHRISTINE ARE
DATING.

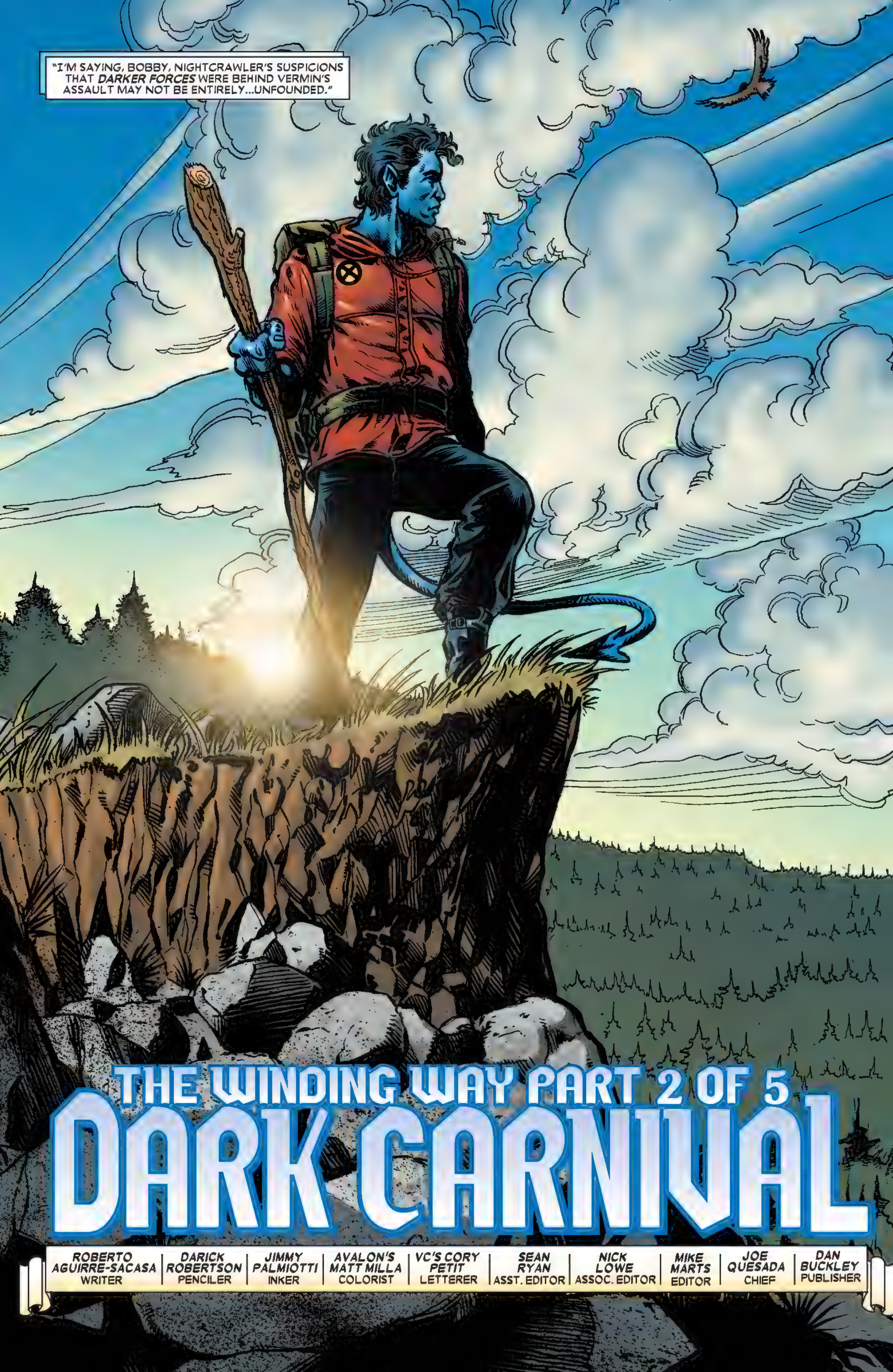
THOUGH
THERE **ARE**--LIKE
PSYCHIC FINGERPRINTS--
ALL OVER HIS GANGLIA
AND SYNAPSES...

...TRACES
OF **ANOTHER**
PRESENCE.

YOU'RE
SAYING...

...WHAT,
MIND
CONTROL?

"I'M SAYING, BOBBY, NIGHTCRAWLER'S SUSPICIONS THAT *DARKER FORCES* WERE BEHIND VERMIN'S ASSAULT MAY NOT BE ENTIRELY...UNFOUNDED."



THE WINDING WAY PART 2 OF 5

DARK CARNIVAL

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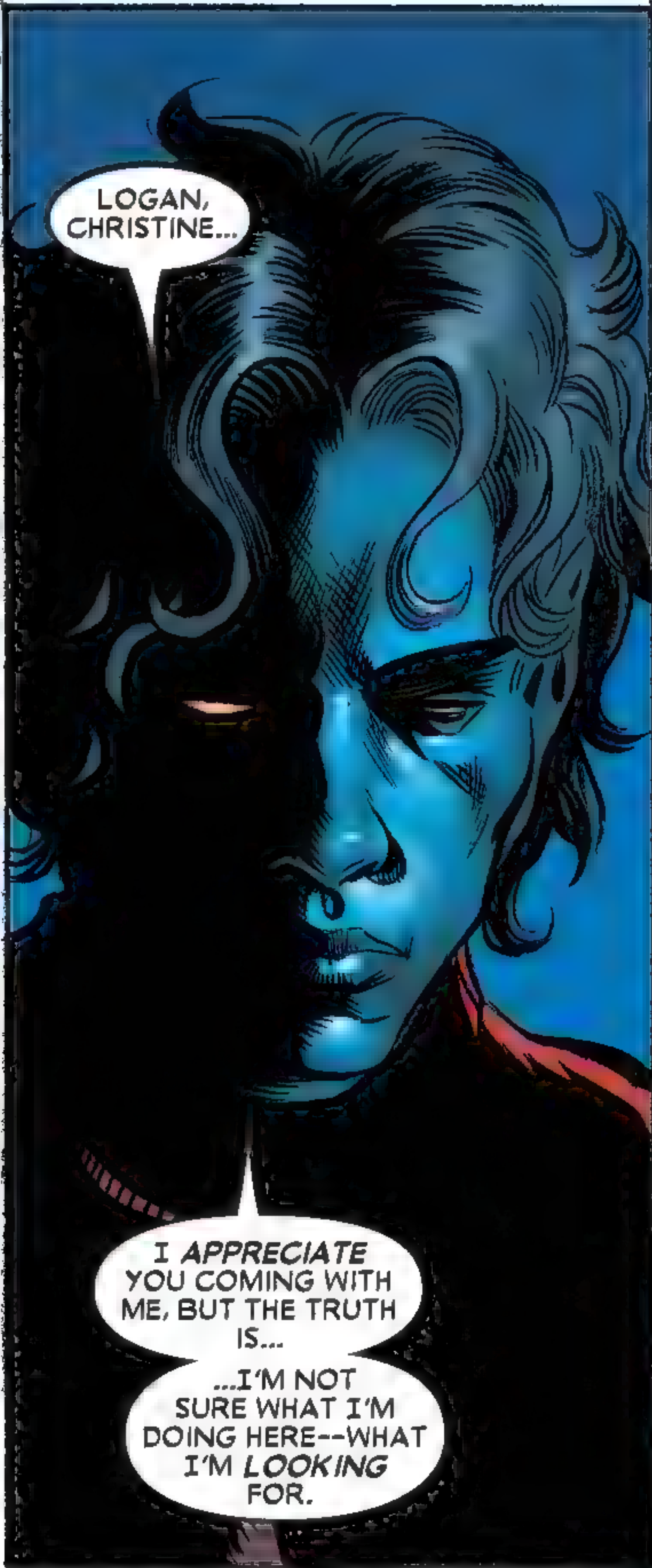
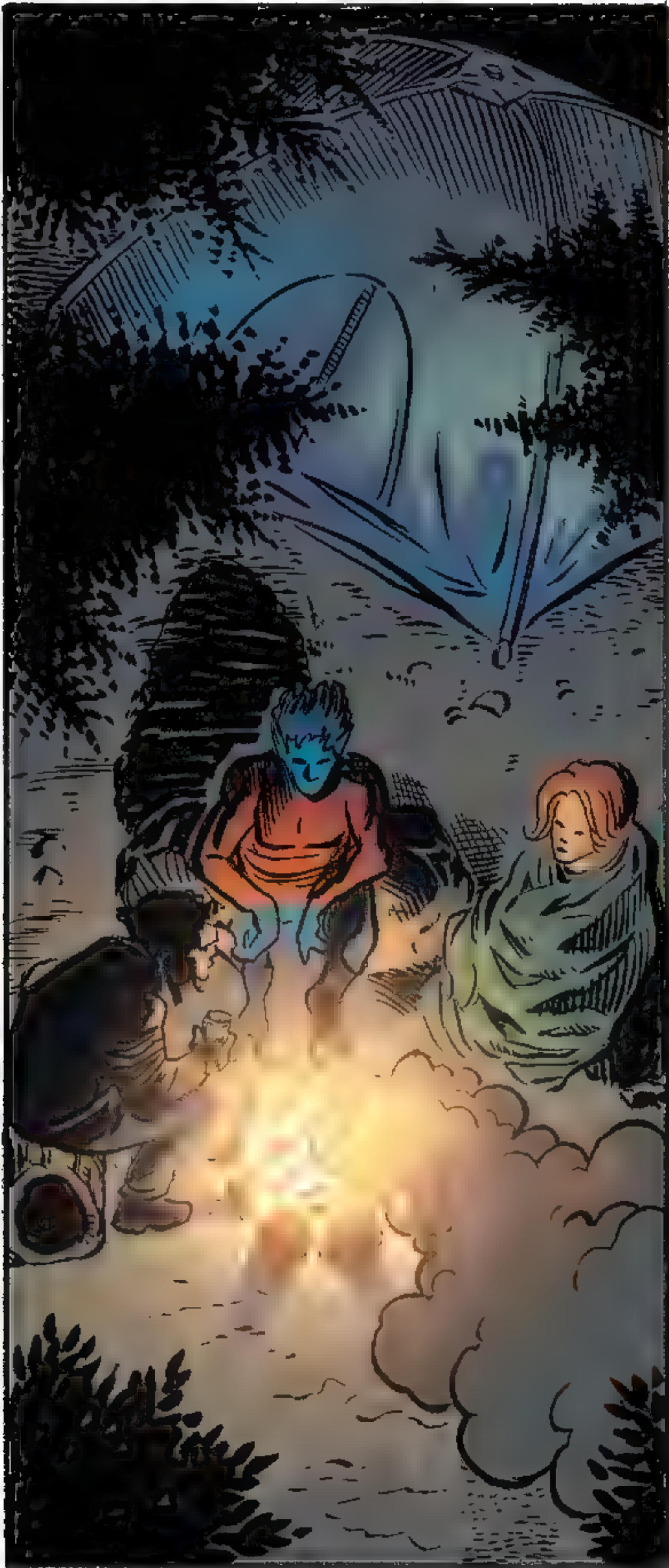
MIKE
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LOGAN,
CHRISTINE...

I APPRECIATE
YOU COMING WITH
ME, BUT THE TRUTH
IS...

...I'M NOT
SURE WHAT I'M
DOING HERE--WHAT
I'M LOOKING
FOR.



SINCE
VERMIN'S ATTACK,
THESE DREAMS I'VE
BEEN HAVING...

...LIKE
VISIONS AND
ECHOES OF MY...
MY PAST.

WE
KNOW,
KURT.



THE UNSHAKABLE
FEELING THAT WHAT'S
HAPPENING NOW--
WHATEVER'S HAPPENING
NOW--IS SOMEHOW
LINKED TO WHERE I
CAME FROM...

SCOTT WOULD
SAY IT DOESN'T
MAKE RATIONAL
SENSE, BUT--

SURE IT
DOES.



LOOK,
PAL, I DON'T KNOW
MUCH, BUT I DO KNOW
THERE'S NOTHING MORE
RATIONAL THAN WANTING
TO GO BACK TO WHERE
YOU CAME FROM
EVERY NOW AND
AGAIN.



IT'S
SOMETHING
NOT ALL OF US
CAN DO.



LOGAN...

I'M BEAT, ELF. AND WE GOTTA LOTTA WALKING TO DO TOMORROW.



LISTEN, KURT, I KNOW I MADE YOU BRING ME, BUT...

...WOULD YOU RATHER BE LEFT ALONE RIGHT NOW?



"KURT?"

WHAT ARE YOU DOING ALONE HERE, KURT?

STEPHEN, I--!
NOTHING, I WAS...

WHAT?



CHRISTINE,
MY STEP-BROTHER
STEPHEN AND I...
...WE PLAYED
IN THESE WOODS.
THIS IS WHERE I
SHOWED HIM...



...WANT
TO SHOW YOU
SOMETHING.
SOMETHING I
CAN DO.

WHAT?



WHEN I
CONCENTRATE
AND IMAGINE MYSELF
GOING TO ANOTHER
PLACE...



BAMF!

KURT--!



...I GO
THERE.



GOTT IN
HIMMEL...



HOW,
KURT?

I
DON'T
KNOW.

JUST
SOMETHING
I CAN DO.



TRICKS
OF THE DEVIL...
BUT HOW--
WHY?

STEPHEN--
I'M NOT
SURE.



WHO
KNOWS ABOUT
THIS?

NOT MY
MOTHER? MY
SISTER?

NO ONE,
BROTHER.
JUST YOU.

NO.



KURT,
LISTEN TO
ME.

MY MOTHER
CAN DO THINGS,
TOO.

TELEPORT,
YOU MEAN?



NO,
THINGS WITH
MAGIC.

SHE DOES
THEM IN HER ROOM,
WHEN EVERYONE
ELSE IS ASLEEP.



"SO THAT NIGHT,
CHRISTINE, WE STAYED
UP LATE AND..."

DO
YOU SEE, MY
BROTHER?



STEPHEN...



"DURING THE DAY, MARGALI
WAS THE CIRCUS'S RESIDENT
FORTUNE-TELLER AND GYPSY.

"FOR A DOLLAR, SHE WOULD
TELL YOU THAT YOUR FUTURE WAS
BRIGHT AND FULL OF JOY.

"AT NIGHT, THOUGH,
SHE PRACTICED...OTHER,
DARKER ARTS."



KURT, IT'S REAL.

I DON'T UNDERSTAND...



SHE TAUGHT HERSELF. AND TEACHES HERSELF STILL.

THE WAY JIMAINIE TRAINS TO BECOME A TRAPEZE ARTIST, SHE TRAINS TO BECOME...A SORCERER.



SHE SAYS IT'S IN HER BLOOD-- IN ALL OF OUR FAMILY'S BLOOD.

THAT IT'S OUR DESTINY AND BIRTHRIGHT.

YOURS AND JIMAINIE'S?

YES, BUT...

...I'M AFRAID, KURT.

WHAT IF THAT PART OF ME-- OF OUR FAMILY-- THAT PULLS US TOWARDS MAGIC...

...WHAT IF THAT MAKES ME OR JIMAINIE EVIL? CORRUPTS US?

NOT YOUR SISTER, STEPHEN. NOT HER, NOT EVER.

ME, THEN.





HE WAS...
ADAMANT,
CHRISTINE. LIKE
HE KNEW...



KURT,
YOU CALLED
YOUR STEP-
SISTER...

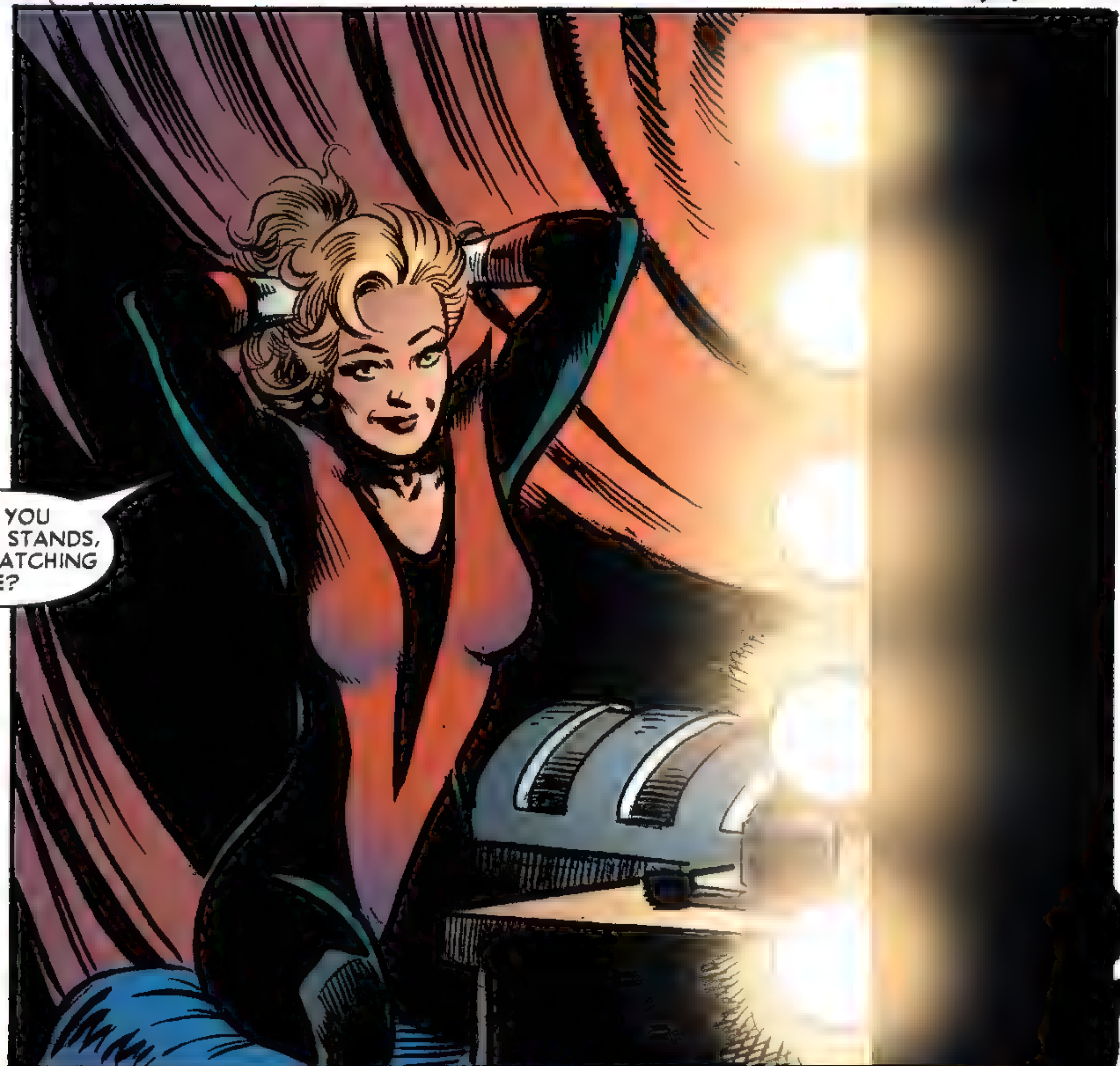
...JIMAINÉ?
NOT AMANDA?



BECAUSE
THAT'S HER REAL
NAME. WHAT WE
CALLED HER...



"...WHEN
WE WERE
TEENAGERS."



...
WILL YOU
BE IN THE STANDS,
KURT? WATCHING
ME?



JIMAINÉ...
...YOU KNOW
I CAN'T BE OUT IN
THE OPEN LIKE EVERY-
ONE ELSE. NOT
LOOKING THE WAY
I DO.



BUT
BELIEVE ME
WHEN I TELL
YOU...

...I'LL BE
NEARBY. WATCHING
YOU VERY, VERY
CLOSELY.



DAMEN! HERREN!
LADIES! GENTLEMEN!
LOOK SKYWARDS! LOOK
AND BE AMAZED BY THE
DEATH-DEFYING FEATS OF
JIMAIN SZARDOS...



...THE
FLYING MAIDEN
OF THE SWING
TRAPEZE!



YOU THINK SHE'S
BEAUTIFUL, KURT,
DON'T YOU? MY
SISTER?

STEPHEN,
I...



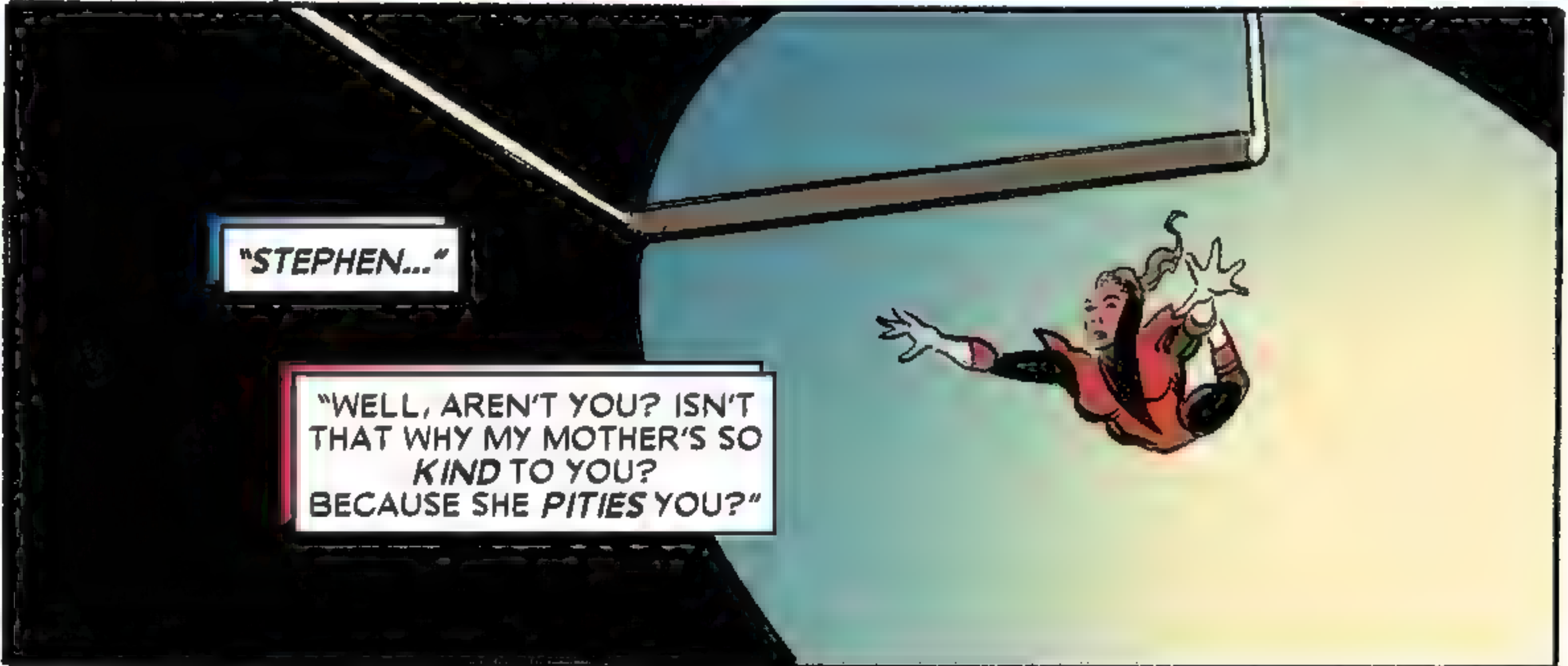
"...I DO,
YES."

"MORE'S THE
PITY, THEN,
KURT."



"WHAT...?"

"IF YOU THINK JIMAIN WOULD EVER
DO ANYTHING WITH YOU...LOOK AT
YOURSELF--YOU'RE A MONSTER."



"STEPHEN..."

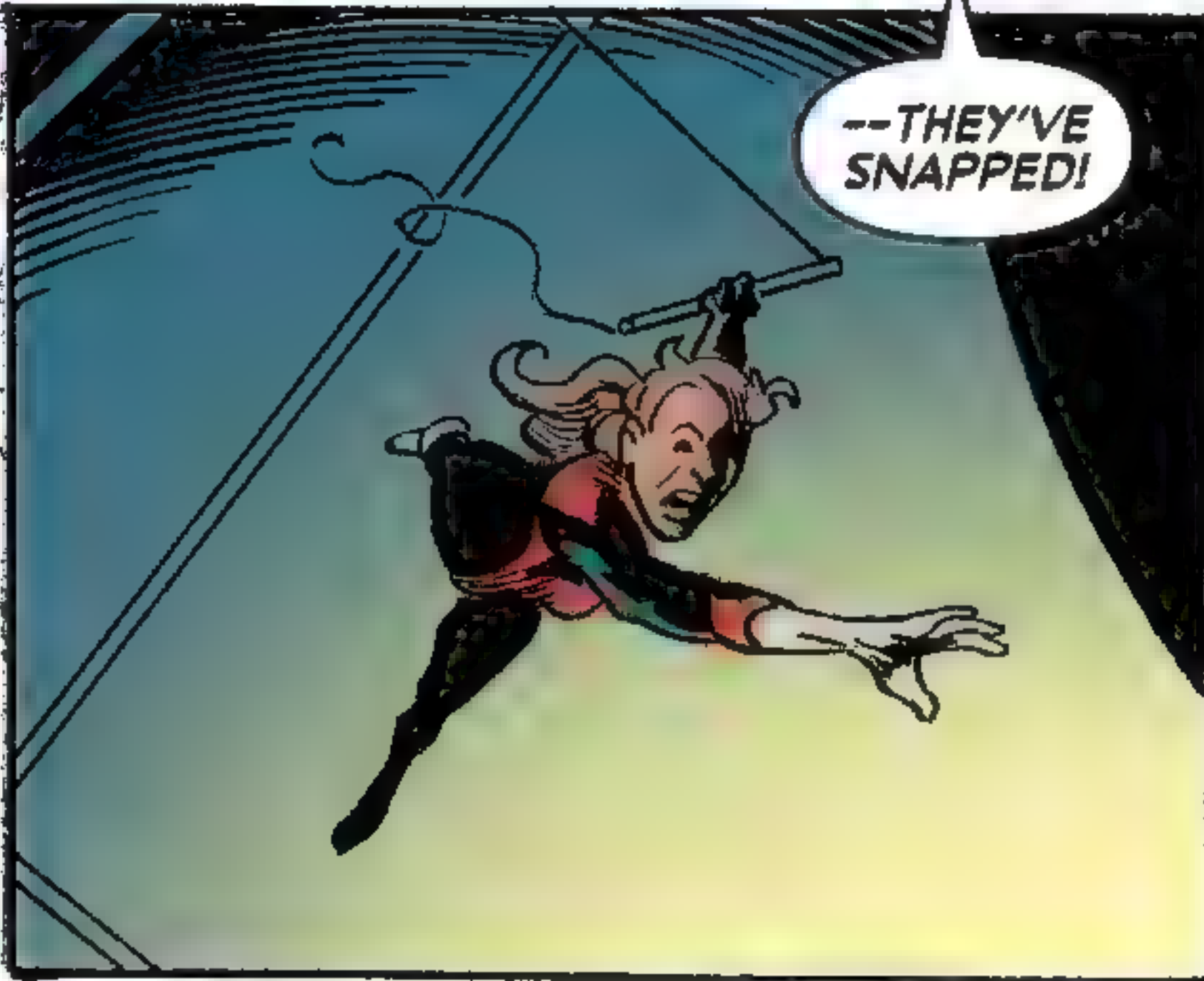
"WELL, AREN'T YOU? ISN'T
THAT WHY MY MOTHER'S SO
KIND TO YOU?
BECAUSE SHE PITIES YOU?"



OH, GOD--
LOOK! THE
GIRL!



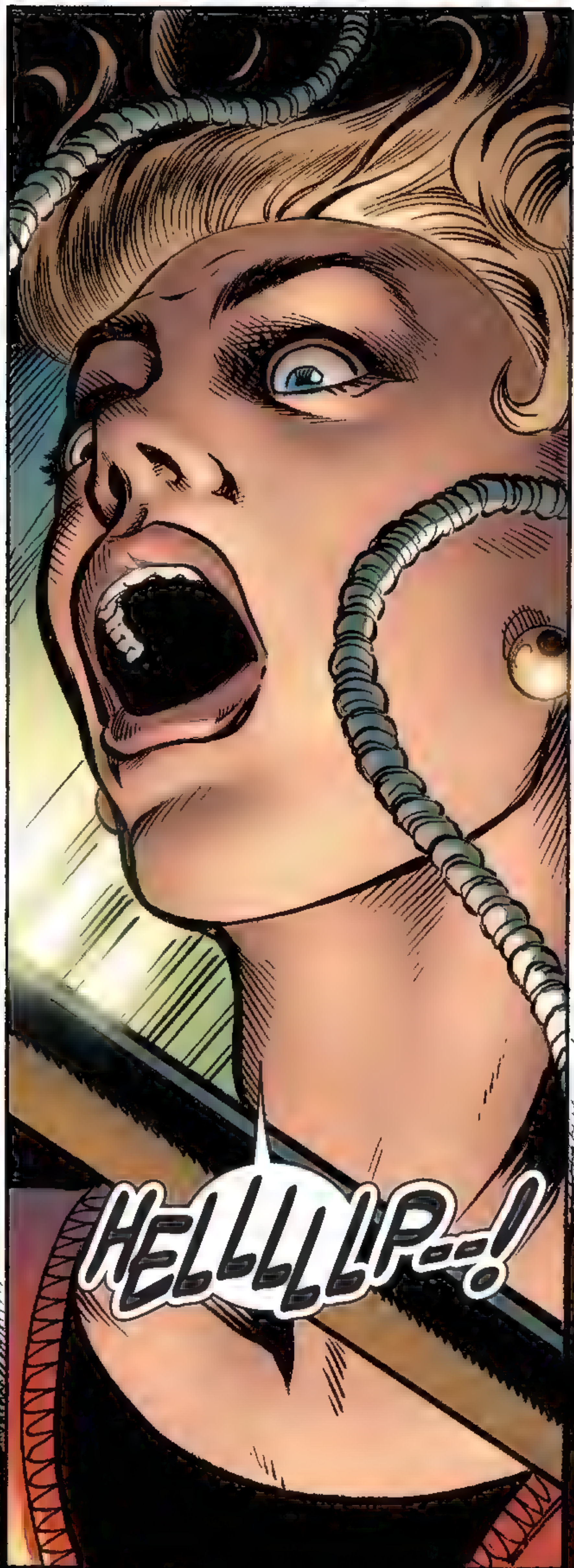
THE
ROPES--



--THEY'VE
SNAPPED!



JIMAINES?



HELLLIP--!



HOLD
ON--





KURT?

HOLD YOUR
BREATH.



MY--?

BAM!

WHAT
HAPPENED--?

WHERE
DID THEY--?

BAM!

--FINE, IT
JUST HURTS A
BIT. WHENEVER I
TELEPORT MORE
THAN JUST
ME.

--UHNFFF!

WHAT
WAS THAT
BLUE--?

A
MONSTER? A
DEMON?

KURT,
ARE YOU--?

TELEPORT?



KURT-- I DON'T KNOW HOW OR WHY I CAN DO IT, BUT I THINK THAT I WAS *BORN* WITH IT. THAT THERE'S SOMETHING *INSIDE* ME--



BUT KURT-- DON'T-- DON'T BE SCARED, JIMAINIE. IT DOESN'T MEAN I'M A MONSTER OR A DEMON OR--



NO, KURT, LISTEN-- AND I'VE BEEN MEANING TO TELL YOU. I WAS GOING TO, BUT THEN I TOLD STEPHEN AND--
--PLEASE, KURT, CAN I JUST--?

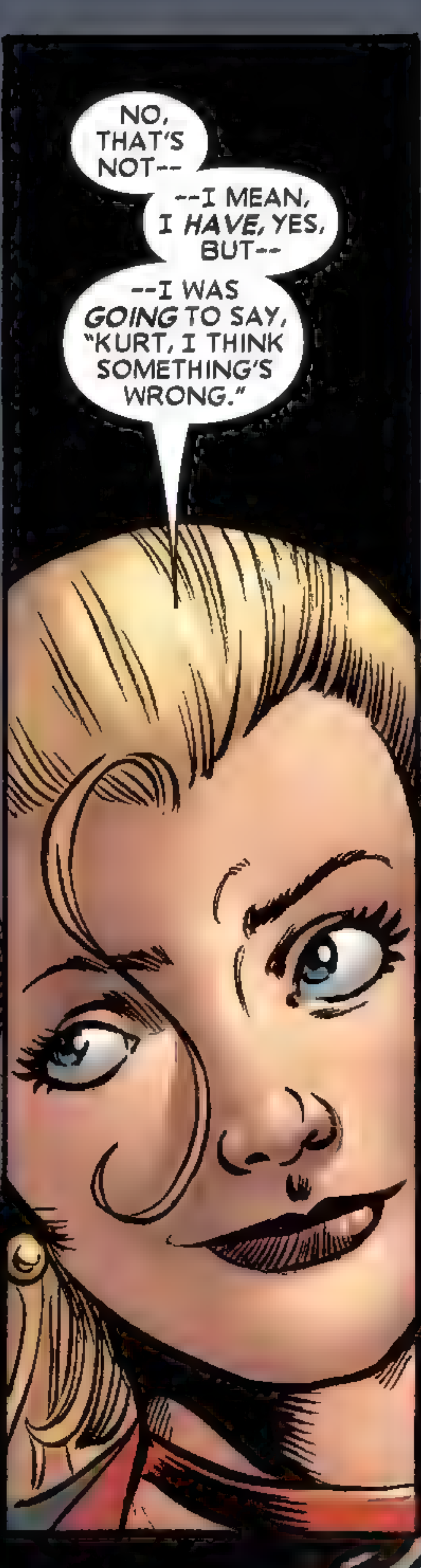


...



KURT,
I--

--HAVE BEEN
WANTING TO DO
THAT FOR A WHILE
NOW? I KNOW--
ME, TOO.



NO,
THAT'S
NOT--

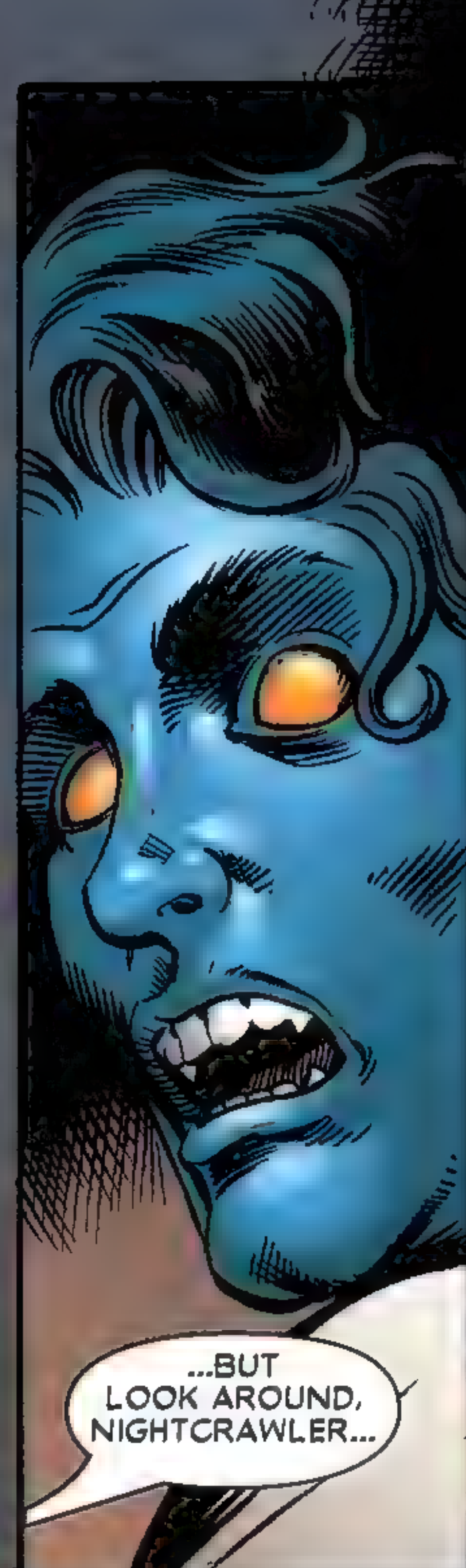
--I MEAN,
I HAVE, YES,
BUT--

--I WAS
GOING TO SAY,
"KURT, I THINK
SOMETHING'S
WRONG."

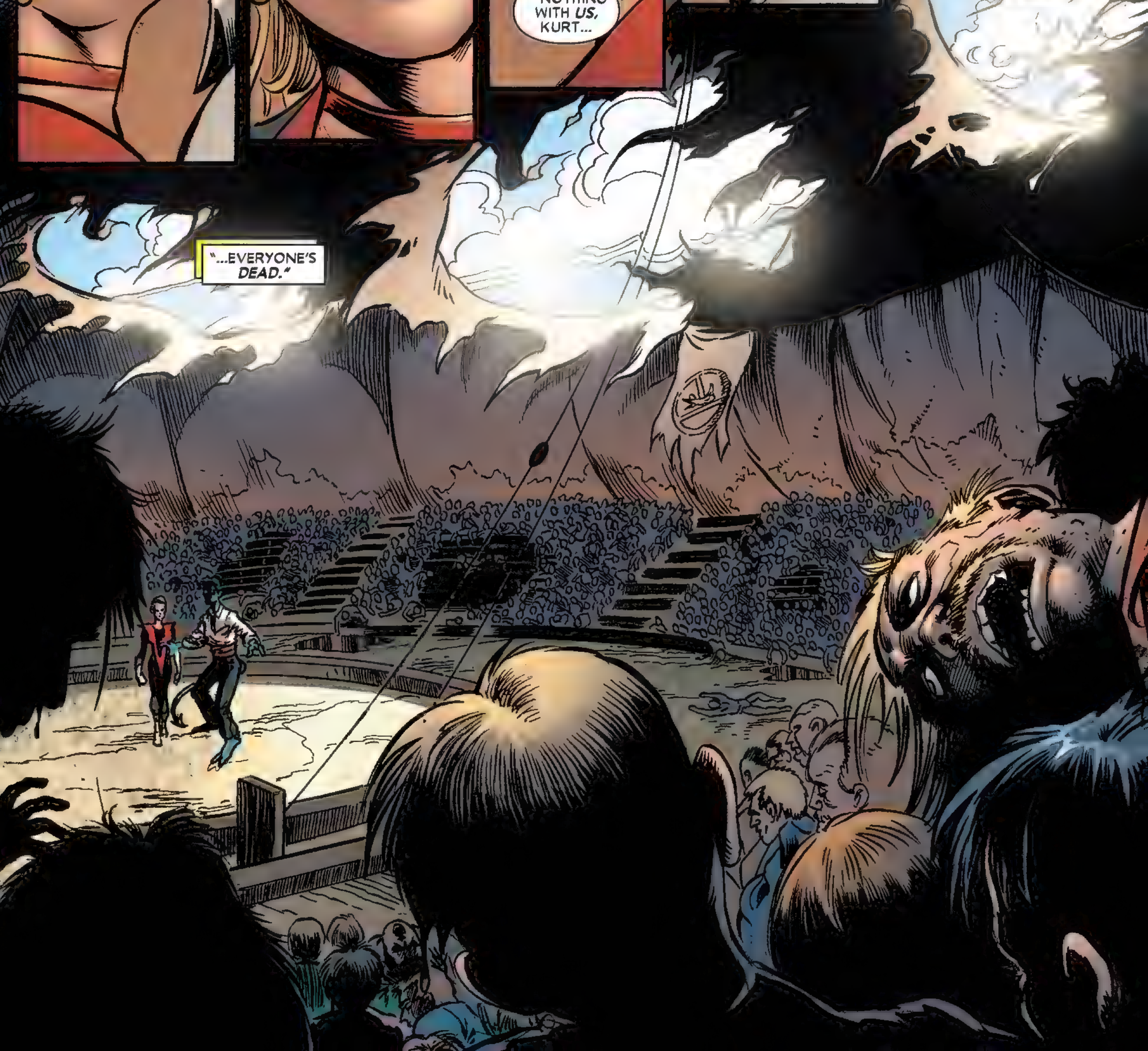


WRONG?
WHAT COULD
BE WRONG
WITH--?

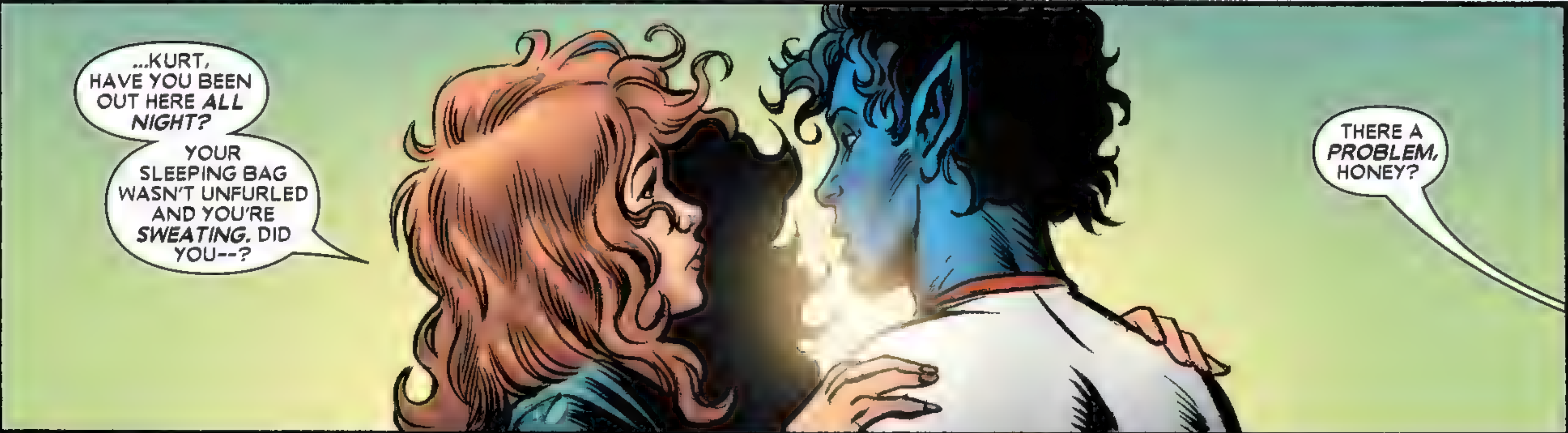
--NOTHING
WITH US,
KURT...



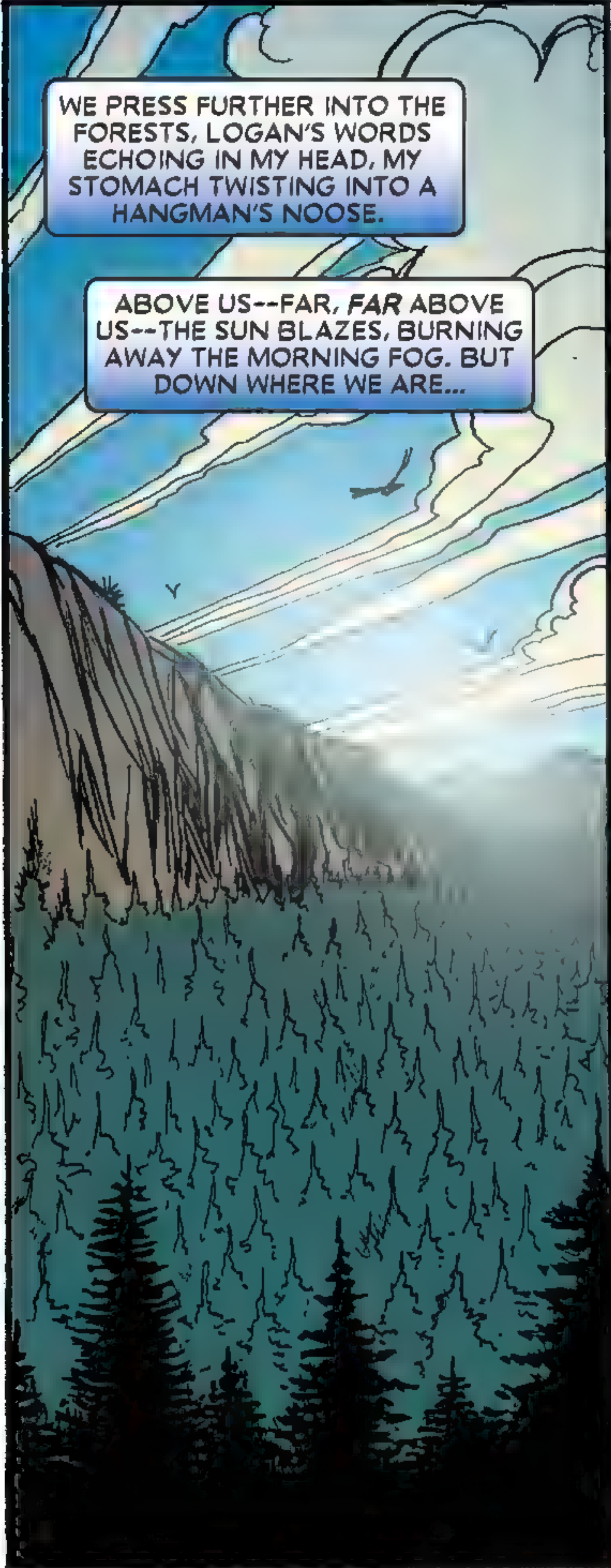
...BUT
LOOK AROUND,
NIGHTCRAWLER...



"...EVERYONE'S
DEAD."







WE PRESS FURTHER INTO THE FORESTS, LOGAN'S WORDS ECHOING IN MY HEAD, MY STOMACH TWISTING INTO A HANGMAN'S NOOSE.

ABOVE US--FAR, FAR ABOVE US--THE SUN BLAZES, BURNING AWAY THE MORNING FOG. BUT DOWN WHERE WE ARE...



GETTING REAL CLOSE NOW.

HE'S RIGHT.



OLD MEMORIES, OLD PATTERNS, OLD *INSTINCTS* ARE SURFACING MORE AND MORE NOW. LIKE... MUCK-DWELLING FISH COMING BACK TO LIFE WITH THE SPRING THAW.

I ALMOST BELIEVE I COULD CLOSE MY EYES AND PICK MY WAY THROUGH THE TREES. JUST BY REMEMBERING WHAT THEIR BARK FELT LIKE BENEATH MY FINGERTIPS.



THESE PATHS, TRAMPLED AND TRAVELED BY CIRCUS FOLK FOR DECADES--LONGER THAN DECADES--ARE THE VEINS AND ARTERIES THAT WIND THEIR...

...WAIT, I REMEMBER...



...THE WINDING WAY...

OH, NO.

OH, ELF...



YOU KNOW
THOSE BAD DREAMS
YOU'VE BEEN HAVING?
THE ONES THAT MADE
YOU--US--COME
HERE?



WELL, PAL...
I GOT A FEELING
THEY'RE ABOUT TO
GET WORSE.

⊗NEXT: SWAMP COUNTRY!

MARVEL

9

AGUIRRE-SACASA

ROBERTSON

PALMIOTTI

WISDOM BRAWLER

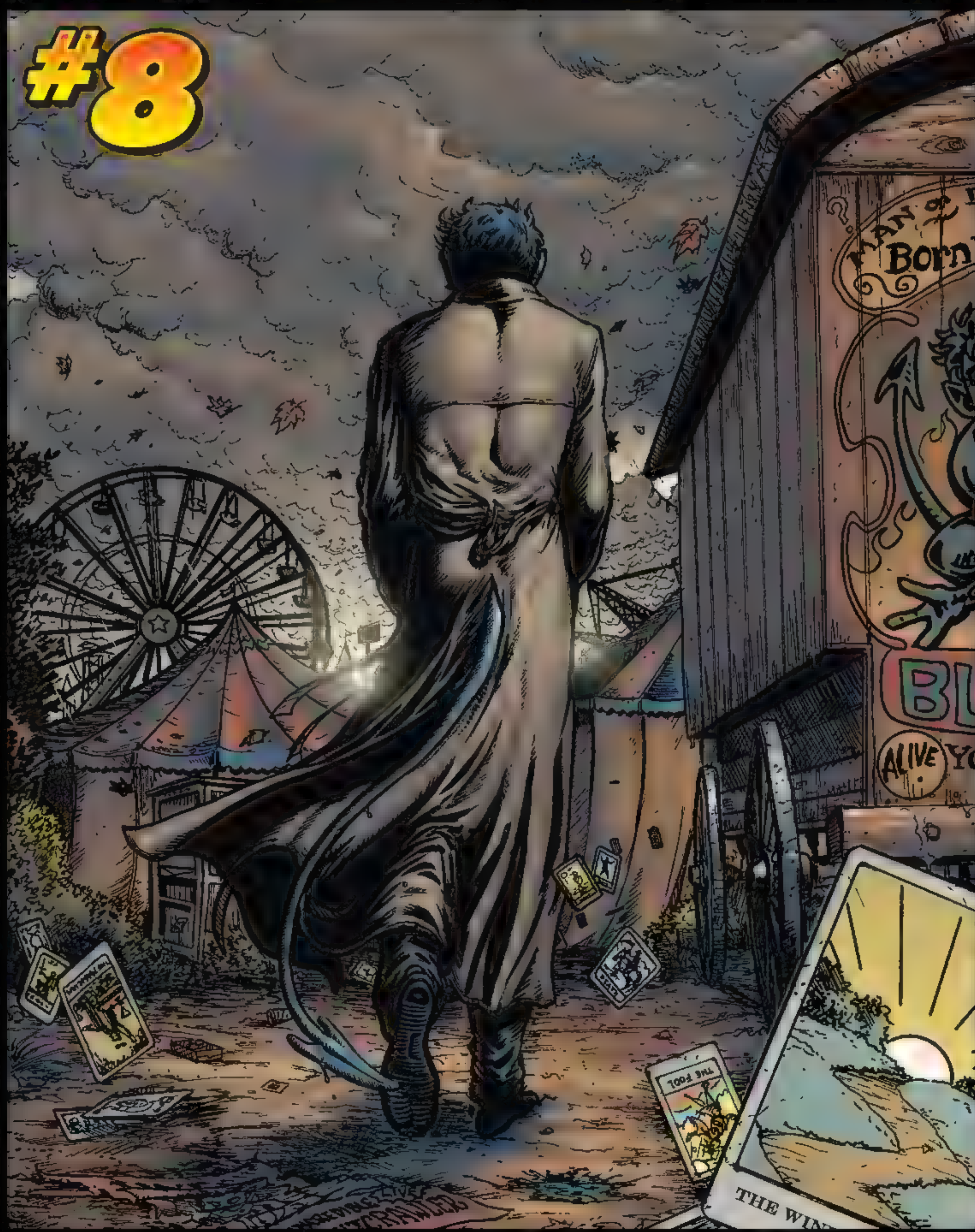


He's your best friend *and* the monster that lives under your bed! And he must go where the other X-Men won't—into the shadows that have always called to him!

PREVIOUSLY

NIGHTCRAWLER

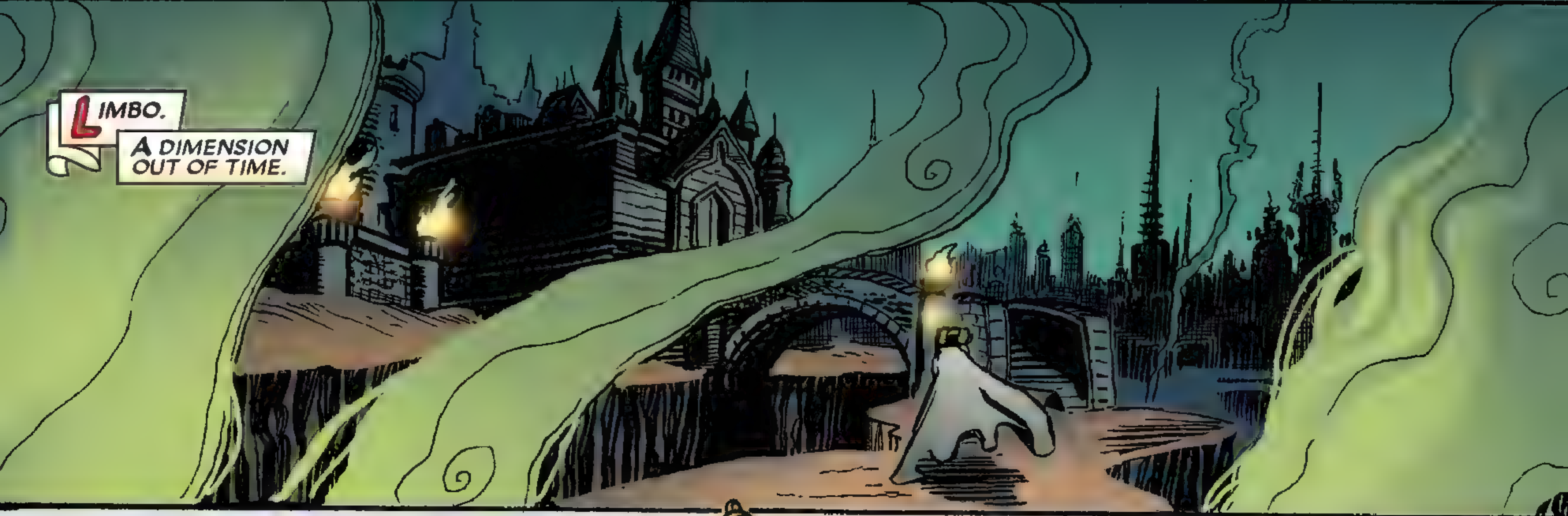
"THE WINDING WAY"



Strange and mysterious have been the recent days of KURT WAGNER, aka the X-MAN, NIGHTCRAWLER. He has been plagued with dreams of his past, from his days in the German circus, to being chased in the streets by a mob—even to his days as an X-Man. No part of his past has been left untouched.

To discover the meaning of these dreams, he traveled to Germany with WOLVERINE and his "is-she-or-isn't-she" girlfriend, CHRISTIE PALMER. The trip uncovered a lot of memories for Kurt, memories of his days as a boy in a traveling circus. Most of the memories revolved around his foster family—mother MARGALI SZARDOS, brother STEPHEN, and sister JIMAINÉ (who is now AMANDA SEFTON, ruler of LIMBO).

Kurt, Wolverine, and Christine continued to make their way through Germany, where they finally discovered the old circus from Nightcrawler's past. It's just like Kurt remembers it, only now it's in flames!



LIMBO.
A DIMENSION
OUT OF TIME.



WHAT...?

A PLACE THIS
WOMAN--THIS
SORCERESS--
KNOWS WELL.



BRAD...
ROGER...

...BUT YOU'RE
GUARDIANS.



HER NAME IS MARGALI
SZARDOS. ONCE, SHE WAS
CUSTODIAN OF LIMBO.

ENCHANTED
GUARDIANS. WHO
DON'T SLEEP.

WHO ARE PAID,
IN FACT, TO STAY
AWAKE AND
PROTECT...



NOW THAT HONOR
BELONGS TO HER
DAUGHTER--

AMANDA.

THROUGH THE YEARS,
THROUGH VARIOUS
INCARNATIONS, MARGALI
HAS HAD A...TEMPESTUOUS
RELATIONSHIP WITH HER
CHILDREN.



WITH HER DAUGHTER
AMANDA, HER DECEASED
SON STEPHEN, AND HER
FOSTER CHILD KURT
WAGNER.

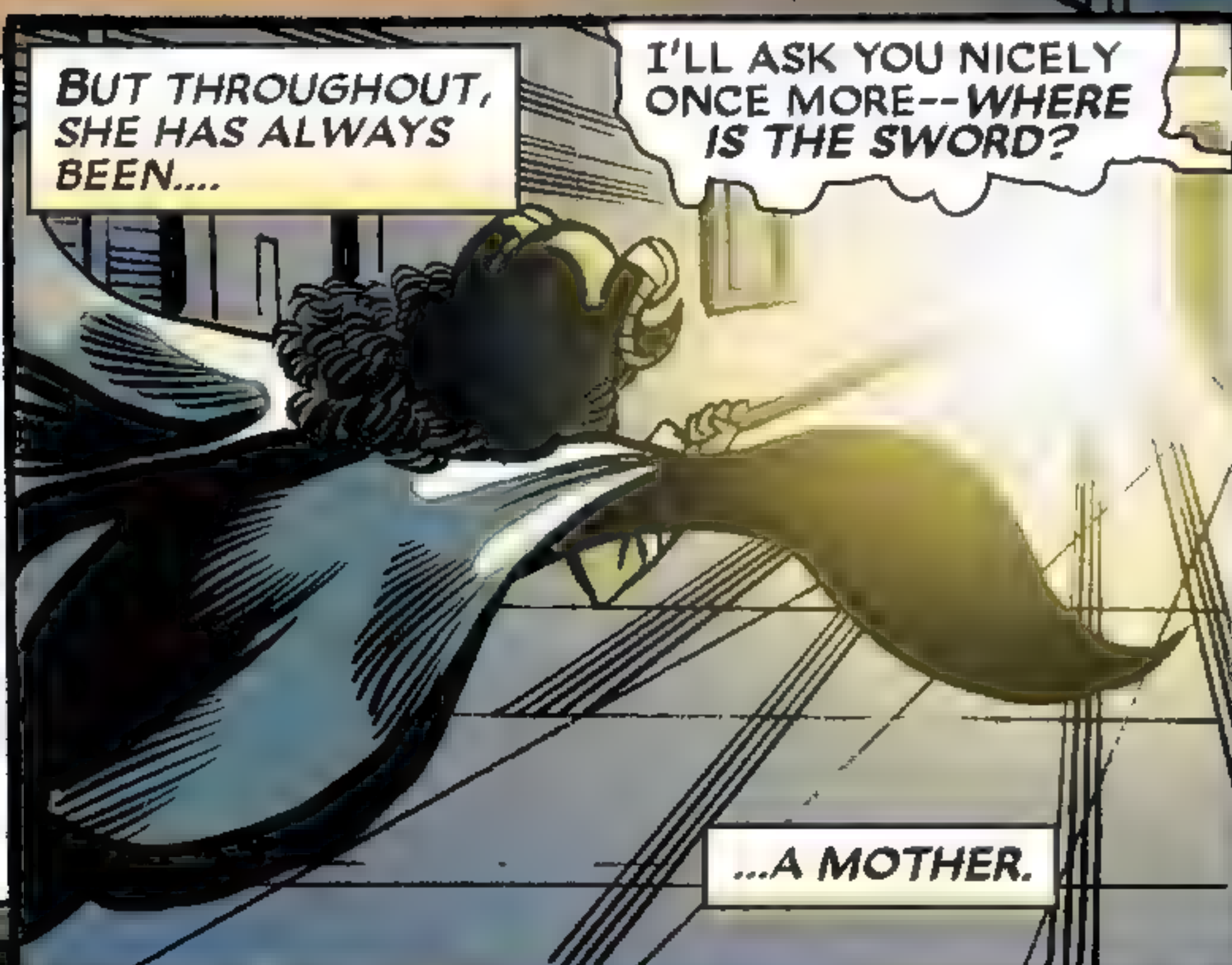


AS HER JOURNEY ALONG
THE WINDING WAY
PROGRESSED--AS HER
KNOWLEDGE OF MAGIC
DEEPEDED--MARGALI HAS
BEEN BOTH GOOD AND EVIL.



BUT THROUGHOUT,
SHE HAS ALWAYS
BEEN....

I'LL ASK YOU NICELY
ONCE MORE--WHERE
IS THE SWORD?



...A MOTHER.

AMANDA!



WELL, WELL,
WELL...

THIS PARTY JUST
GOT MUCH MORE
INTERESTING.

THE WINDING WAY PART 3 OF 5

SWAMP GOTHIC

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WINZELDORF.

A TOWN WITH A SEASONAL CIRCUS AT ITS CENTER, HIDDEN IN THE DARK FORESTS OF BAVARIA, IN THE MOUNTAINS OF GERMANY.



A PLACE THIS MAN--
THIS MUTANT--KNOWS
VERY WELL.

HERE'S
ANOTHER
ONE--

--OH,
LORD--

--ALSO
SLAUGHTERED...



HIS NAME IS KURT WAGNER. ONCE,
HE WAS A BOY HERE, LIVING AND
WORKING AS A PERFORMER--

MEIN
GOTT, WHO
COULD'VE...?

...WHY
WOULD
ANYONE
DO THIS?

BECAUSE
OF ME?



--BUT THAT WAS
A LONG, LONG
TIME AGO.

DEAD.

THESE PEOPLE
WHO WERE MY
FRIENDS, MY
FAMILY.

THEY'RE
ALL--

NOT
ALL OF 'EM,
ELF.





THIS ONE'S ALIVE.

BARELY, BUT HE'S ALIVE.

DO YOU KNOW HIM, KURT? HE SAYS HIS NAME IS--

FEUR, THE FIRE-EATER.



OF COURSE, I--

NIGHTCRAWLER!



...THE AMAZING NIGHTCRAWLER, WE USED TO CALL YOU...

...YOU REMEMBER...?

YES, BUT DON'T--

--DON'T TALK, MY FRIEND. YOU'RE HURT.



...THEY... THEY CAME...

CHRISTINE, HOW BAD IS HE?

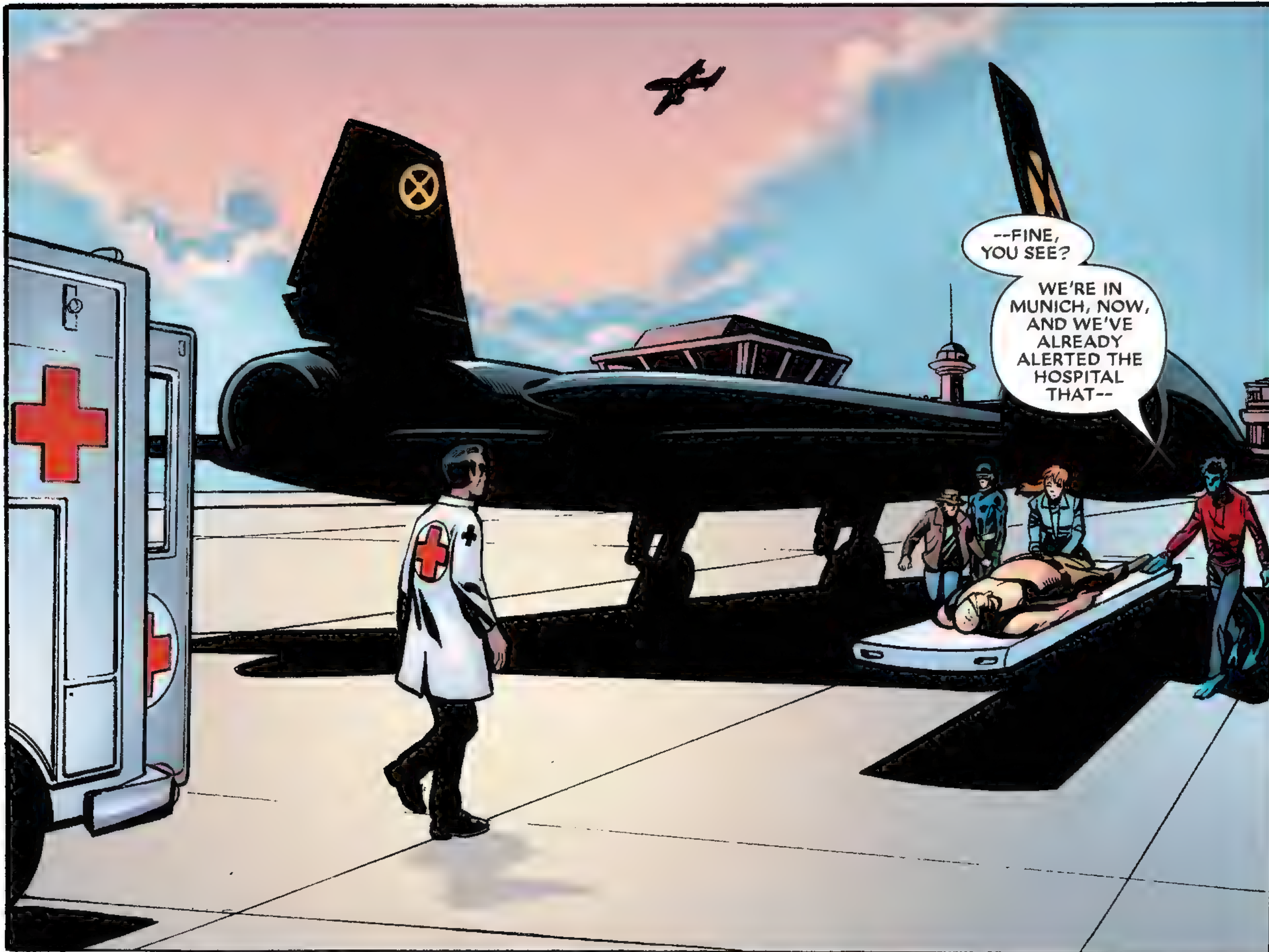
IMPOSSIBLE TO TELL. I'VE BANDAGED ALL HIS EXTERNAL INJURIES, BUT--

BAD, ELF. I CALLED CYKE, WHO'S COMING IN THE BLACKBIRD.



DID YOU HEAR THAT, FEUR? ONE OF MY FRIENDS IS ON HIS WAY. HE'LL GET YOU AND THE OTHER...

...THE OTHERS... TO A HOSPITAL. YOU'RE GOING TO BE--





...THEY WOULDN'T,
THEY SAID, UNTIL THEY
FOUND THE SWORD...

THIS IS
MADNESS. THE
ONLY SWORD I
KNOW OF IS--

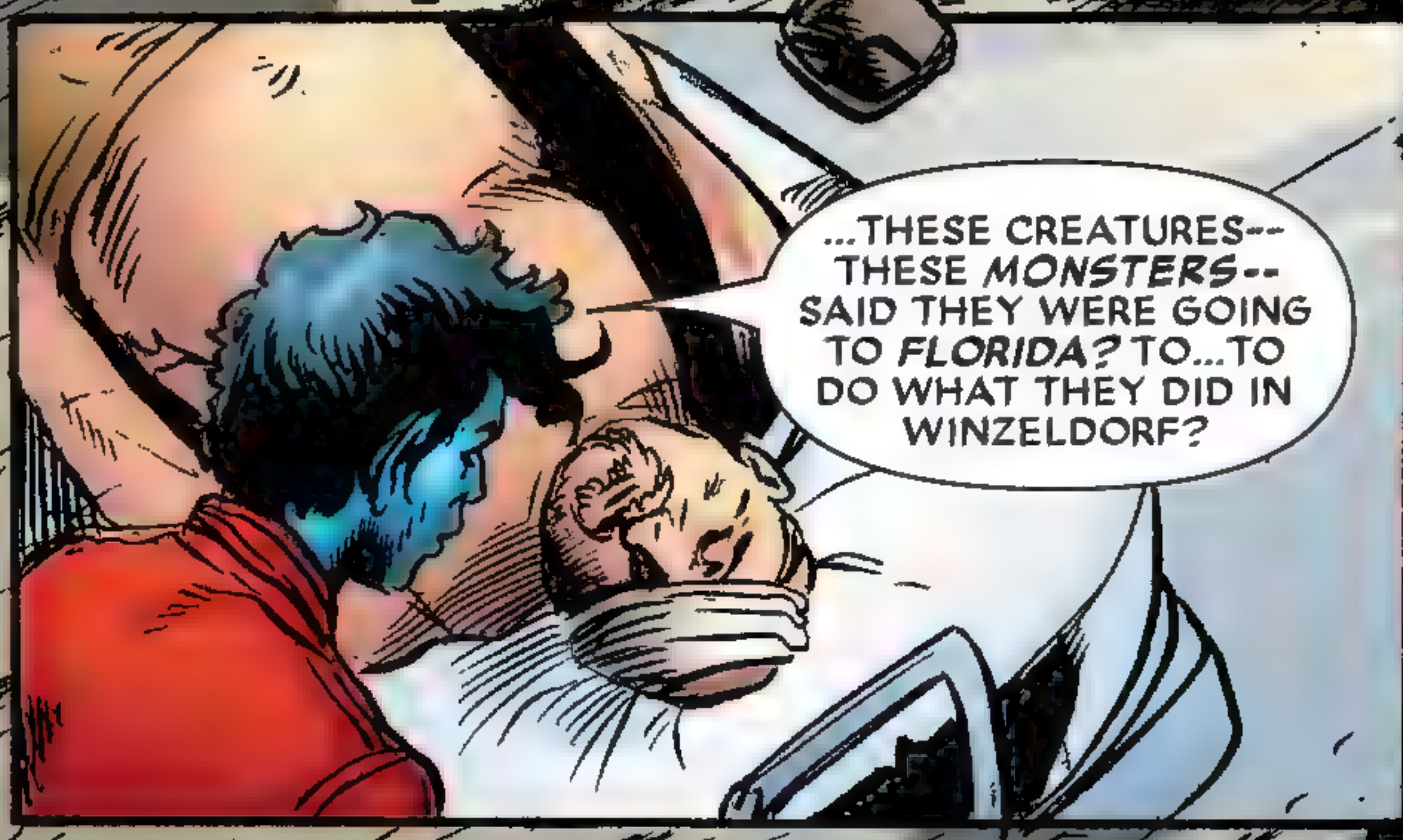
...IN
AMERICA
NEXT, TO
ANOTHER
CIRCUS...

...WHERE
YOU LIVED
FOR A
TIME...

...IN
FLORIDA...

WHATTYA
THINK,
KIDDIES? LITTLE
DIFFERENT FROM
GERMANY,
HUH?

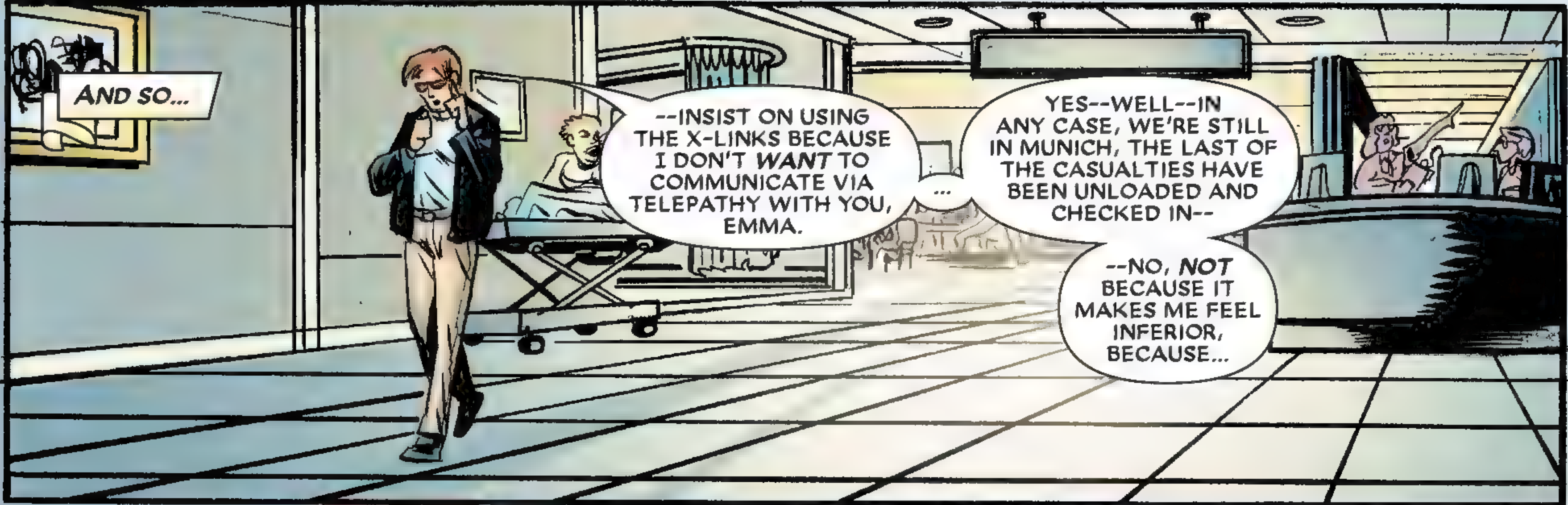
"WAIT,
FEUR..."



...THESE CREATURES--
THESE MONSTERS--
SAID THEY WERE GOING
TO FLORIDA? TO...TO
DO WHAT THEY DID IN
WINZELDORF?



...Y-
YES...



AND SO...

--INSIST ON USING THE X-LINKS BECAUSE I DON'T WANT TO COMMUNICATE VIA TELEPATHY WITH YOU, EMMA.

YES--WELL--IN ANY CASE, WE'RE STILL IN MUNICH, THE LAST OF THE CASUALTIES HAVE BEEN UNLOADED AND CHECKED IN--

--NO, NOT BECAUSE IT MAKES ME FEEL INFERIOR, BECAUSE...



... KURT AND LOGAN? THEY FINISHED BRINGING THE SURVIVORS OFF THE BLACKBIRD WITH HELP FROM THAT CHRISTINE PERSON AND NOW THEY'RE...



...ACTUALLY, I DON'T KNOW WHERE THEY ARE.

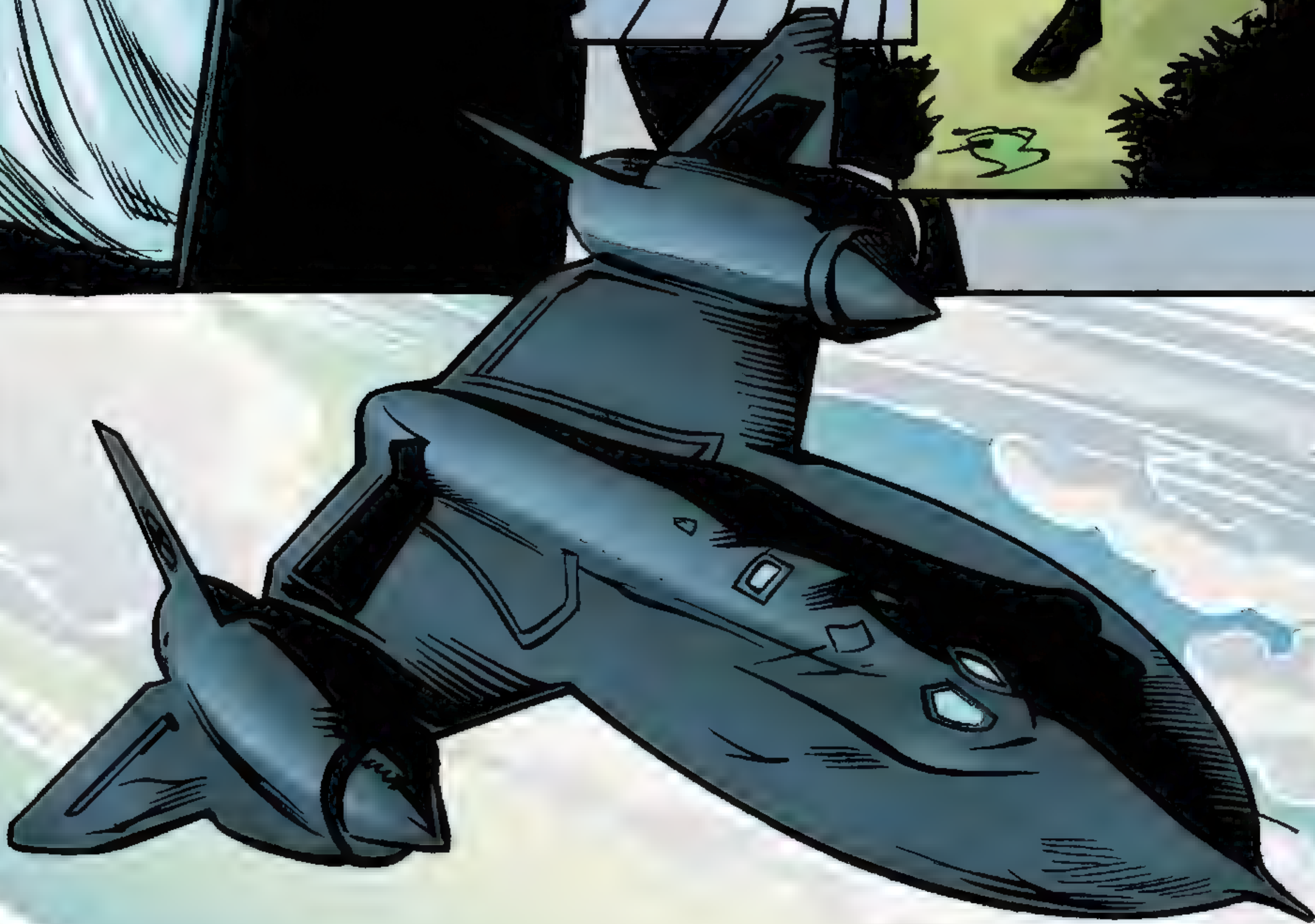
WHY?



BECAUSE, LIGHT OF MY LIFE, NOT TO BE AN EMMA DOWNER, BUT I JUST OVERHEARD THEIR THOUGHTS--

--AND WHILE YOU'RE PLAYING NURSEMAID IN THE EMERGENCY ROOM...

"...THEY'RE STEALING YOUR BELOVED BLACKBIRD!"









"...DO YOU EVEN KNOW WHERE YOU'RE GOING?"



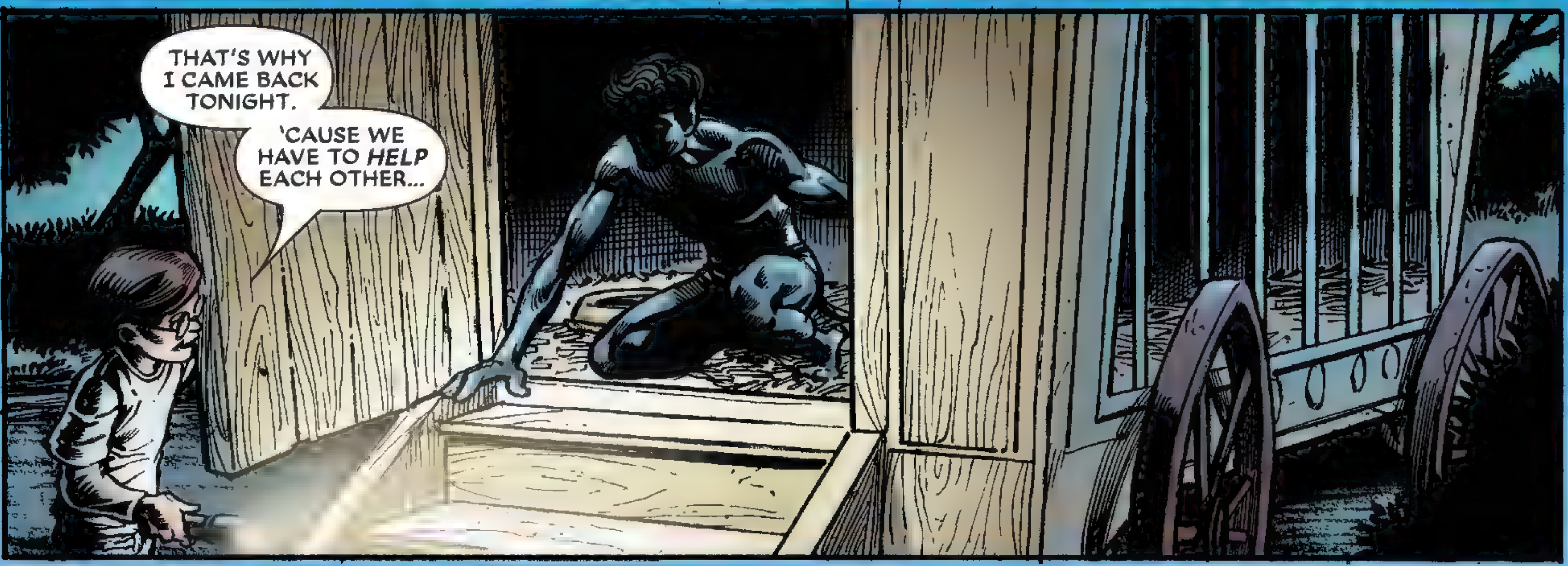
HI, I'M PHILIP...
"NIGHTCRAWLER," RIGHT?

YOU CAN'T TALK, CAN YOU?
IT'S OKAY, YOU DON'T HAVE TO, 'CAUSE...

...I KNOW WHAT YOU ARE.
WHAT YOU REALLY ARE, I MEAN.

A MUTANT, RIGHT? LIKE THEY SHOW ON THE NEWS?
IT'S OKAY-- I AM, TOO.
I KNOW 'CAUSE MY SPECIAL POWER IS TO BE ABLE TO SEE OTHER MUTANTS. LIKE THERE'S A...A SPECIAL LIGHT AROUND THEM.

CLICK!



THAT'S WHY I CAME BACK TONIGHT.
'CAUSE WE HAVE TO HELP EACH OTHER...

"...NO MATTER
WHAT."

ALTHOUGH KURT DOESN'T
REMEMBER EXACTLY WHERE
JARDINE'S CIRCUS IS, HE
HAS A...LOOSE IDEA.

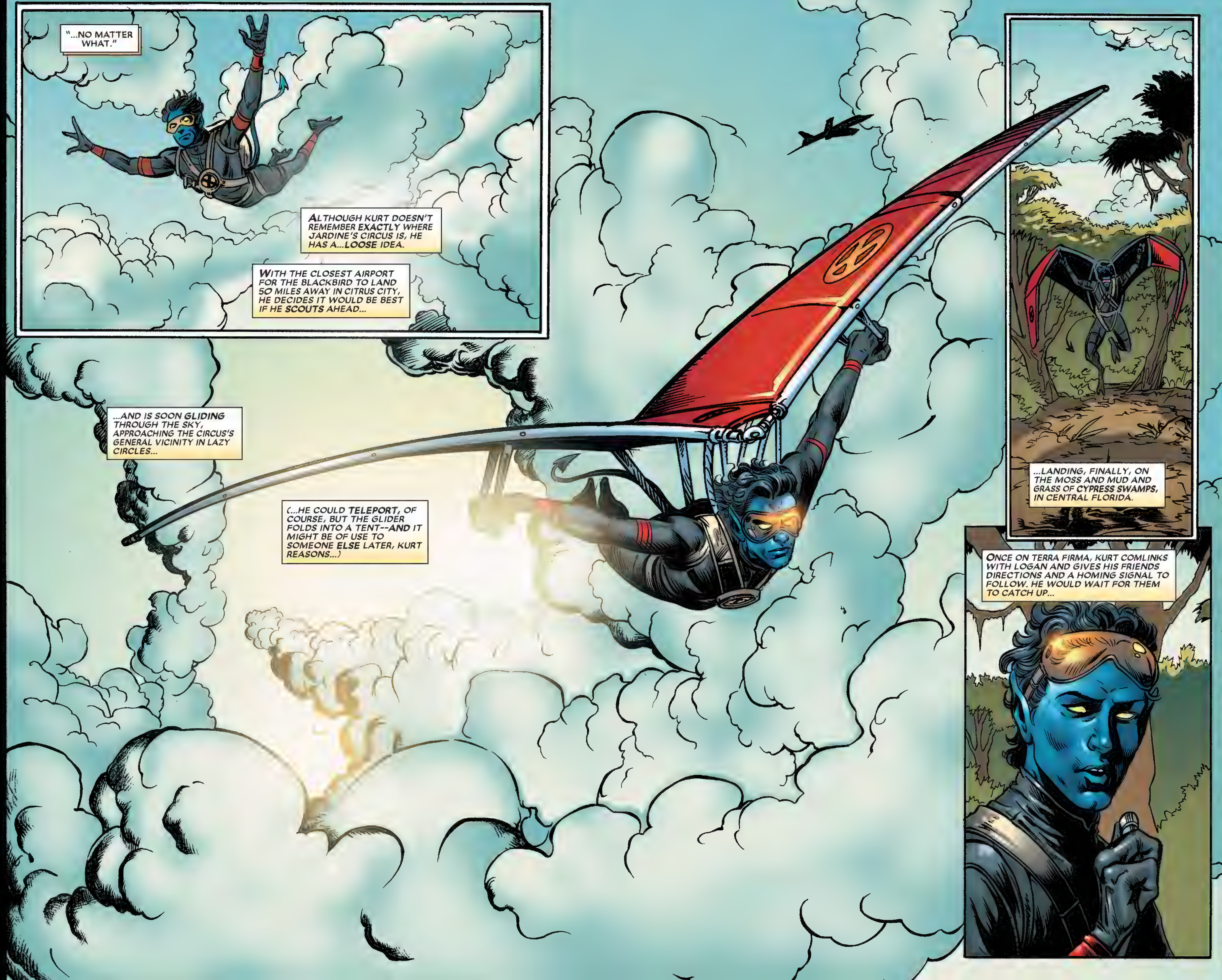
WITH THE CLOSEST AIRPORT
FOR THE BLACKBIRD TO LAND
50 MILES AWAY IN CITRUS CITY,
HE DECIDES IT WOULD BE BEST
IF HE SCOUTS AHEAD...

...AND IS SOON GLIDING
THROUGH THE SKY,
APPROACHING THE CIRCUS'S
GENERAL VICINITY IN LAZY
CIRCLES...

(...HE COULD TELEPORT, OF
COURSE, BUT THE GLIDER
FOLDS INTO A TENT--AND IT
MIGHT BE OF USE TO
SOMEONE ELSE LATER, KURT
REASONS...)

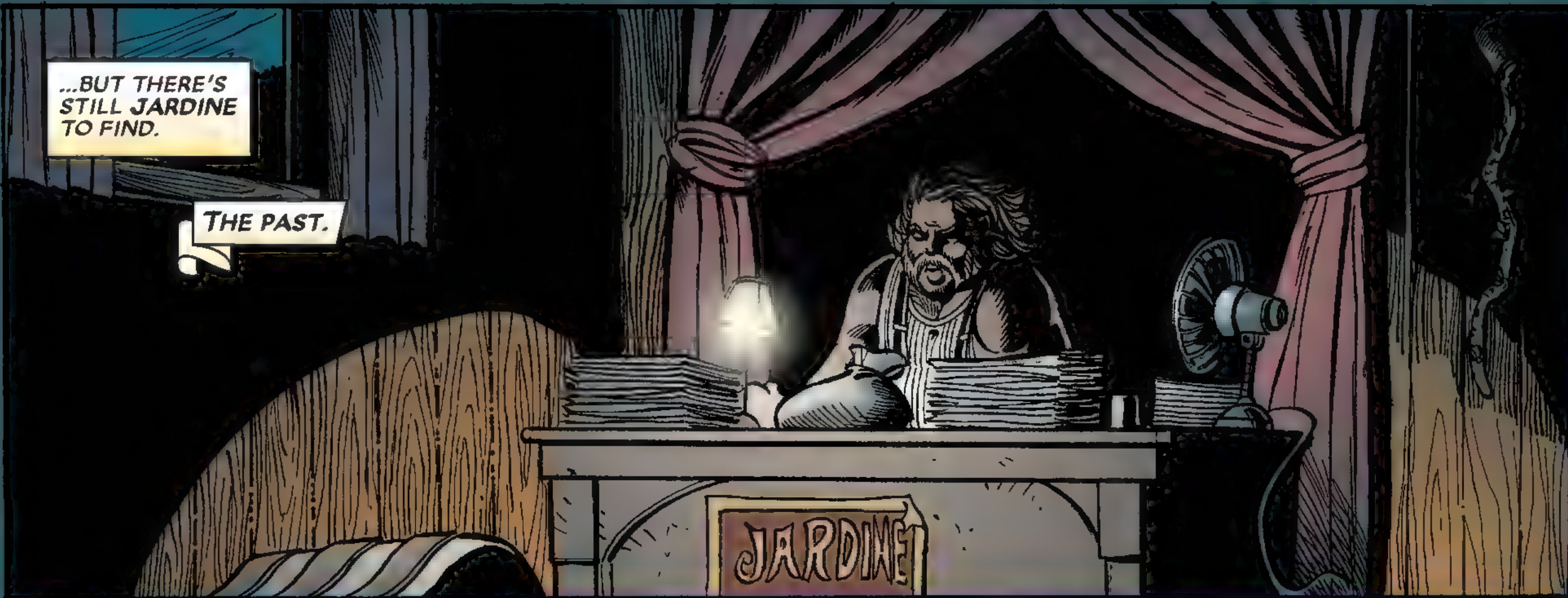
...LANDING, FINALLY, ON
THE MOSS AND MUD AND
GRASS OF CYPRESS SWAMPS,
IN CENTRAL FLORIDA.

ONCE ON TERRA FIRMA, KURT COMLINKS
WITH LOGAN AND GIVES HIS FRIENDS
DIRECTIONS AND A HOMING SIGNAL TO
FOLLOW. HE WOULD WAIT FOR THEM
TO CATCH UP...



...BUT THERE'S
STILL JARDINE
TO FIND.

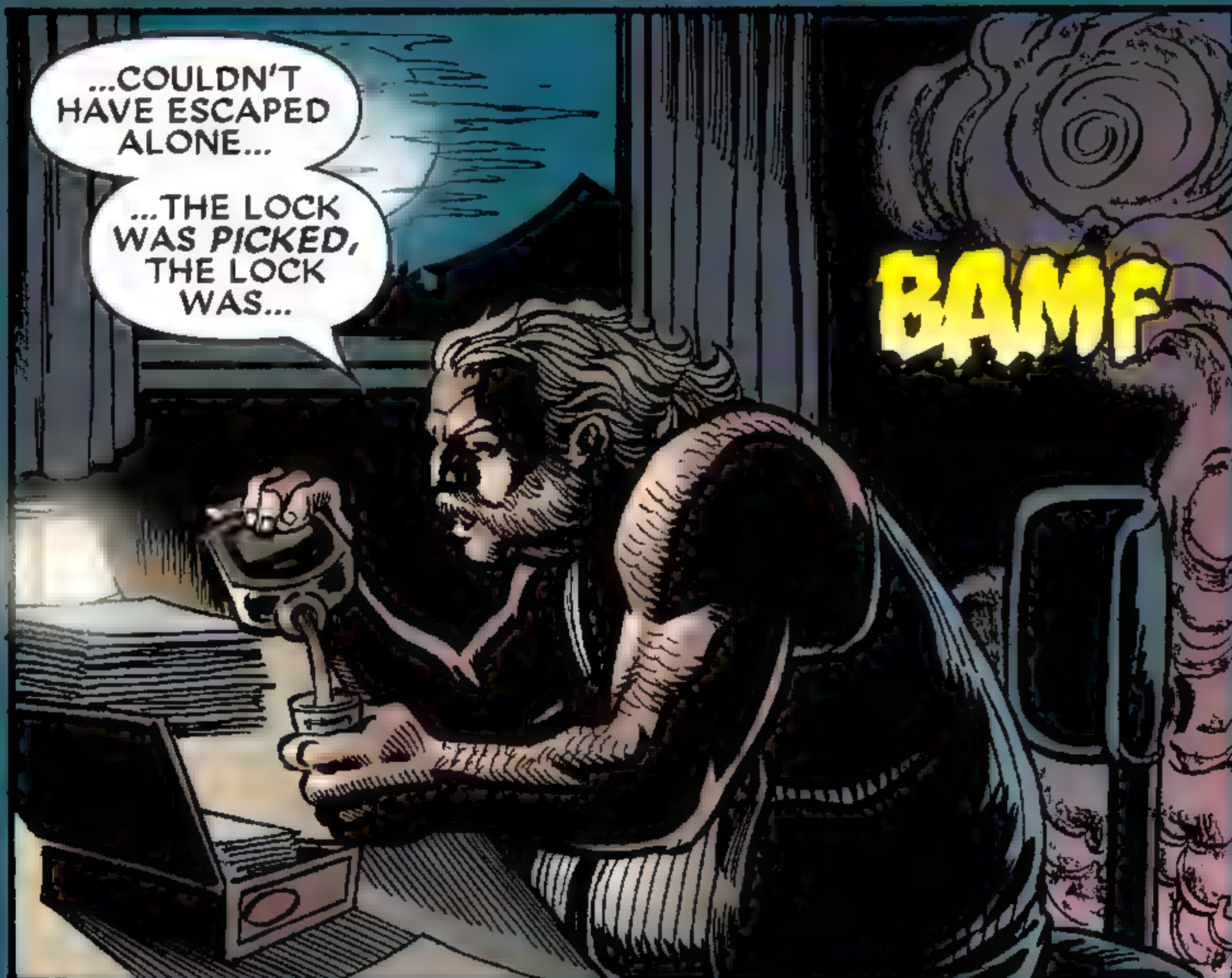
THE PAST.



...COULDN'T
HAVE ESCAPED
ALONE...

...THE LOCK
WAS PICKED,
THE LOCK
WAS...

BAMF



THAT SMELL--
BRIMSTONE--

--OH, GOD,
IT'S--

DON'T
TURN AROUND,
MONSIEUR
JARDINE.



YOU...
YOU CAME
BACK!

GONE FOUR
DAYS, ESCAPED
IN THE MIDDLE OF
THE NIGHT, BUT
YOU CAME
BACK...

YES,
MONSIEUR...



WHY,
NIGHTCRAWLER?

DID YOU REALIZE,
FINALLY, THAT NO
MATTER HOW FAR YOU
RUN, *THIS* IS WHERE YOU
BELONG? THAT HOWEVER
LONG YOU LEAVE
US FOR...



"...YOU'LL ALWAYS
RETURN TO THESE
SWAMPS?"

BACK WHEN I ESCAPED,
JARDINE'S CIRCUS WAS
ON ITS LAST LEGS.
DRUGGED AND ADDLED
AS MY MIND WAS, I
REMEMBER THAT.

THE NIGHT I WENT BACK--
FOUR DAYS AFTER THAT
LITTLE BOY FREED ME--
I THREATENED JARDINE--

I COULD KILL
YOU RIGHT NOW,
FAT MAN, AND NO
ONE WOULD CARE.
NO ONE WOULD
MOURN YOU.

YOU...
YOU WON'T,
THOUGH...

NOT TONIGHT,
NO. BECAUSE,
JARDINE, I BELIEVE
IN...REDEMPTION. I
BELIEVE PEOPLE
CAN CHANGE.

PEOPLE?

YOU,
MONSIEUR.

I'M GIVING YOU
TWO WEEKS TO...
DISCHARGE ANY
EMPLOYEES YOU'RE
KEEPING HERE AGAINST
THEIR WILL. TO STOP
MISTREATING THE
ONES THAT STAY.
TO BECOME...

"...A DECENT
PERSON,
JARDINE."

OF ALL THE
THINGS I
COULD'VE SAID
OR DONE...

(I WASN'T AN X-MAN
YET, I DIDN'T KNOW
ANY BETTER, BUT
STILL...)

I SHOULD'VE BEAT
HIM TO WITHIN AN
INCH OF HIS LIFE,
SHUT HIM AND HIS
CIRCUS OF HORRORS
DOWN...



...THOUGH THE YEARS,
IT SEEMS, HAVE DONE
THAT FOR ME.



IT'S LIKE SOMETHING
OUT OF A STORY BY RAY
BRADBURY... THE CARNIVAL
THAT TIME FORGOT...

THESE PEOPLE--THESE
CARNEYS--SO BEATEN
DOWN THEY BARELY
LOOK UP AT ME...



AT LEAST THEY'RE ALIVE--
THEIR HOME INTACT, NOT
RIPPED APART BY...

WHICH MEANS THAT
EITHER POOR FEUR
WAS WRONG--

--OR THAT THIS IS
JUST THE CALM
BEFORE THE STORM.



EITHER WAY, I
HAVE TO FIND
JARDINE...



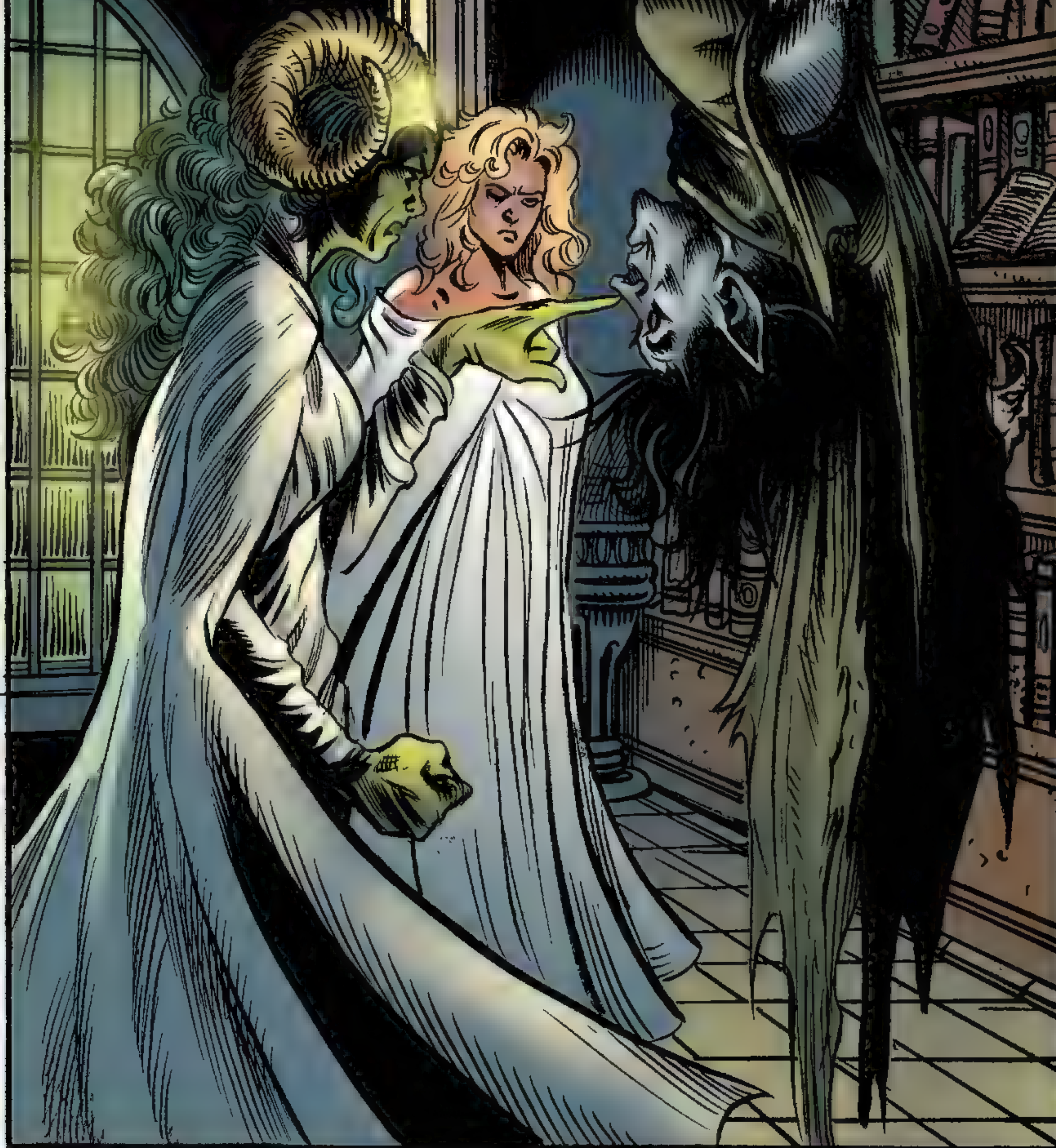
...AND WARN HIM THAT SOMETHING WICKED THIS WAY COMES.

ALL RIGHT, NIGHTMARE, NOW THAT YOU'VE REGAINED CONSCIOUSNESS...

...NOW THAT I'VE STOPPED YOU FROM FURTHER TORTURING MY DAUGHTER...

...TERRIBLE MISTAKE, INCIDENTALLY, LEAVING YOUR REALM AND COMING TO OURS IN YOUR PHYSICAL BODY...

...NOW THAT YOU'RE TRAPPED...



...I'D STRONGLY ADVISE YOU TO TELL US...

...WHY YOU'RE LOOKING FOR THE SOULSWORD?

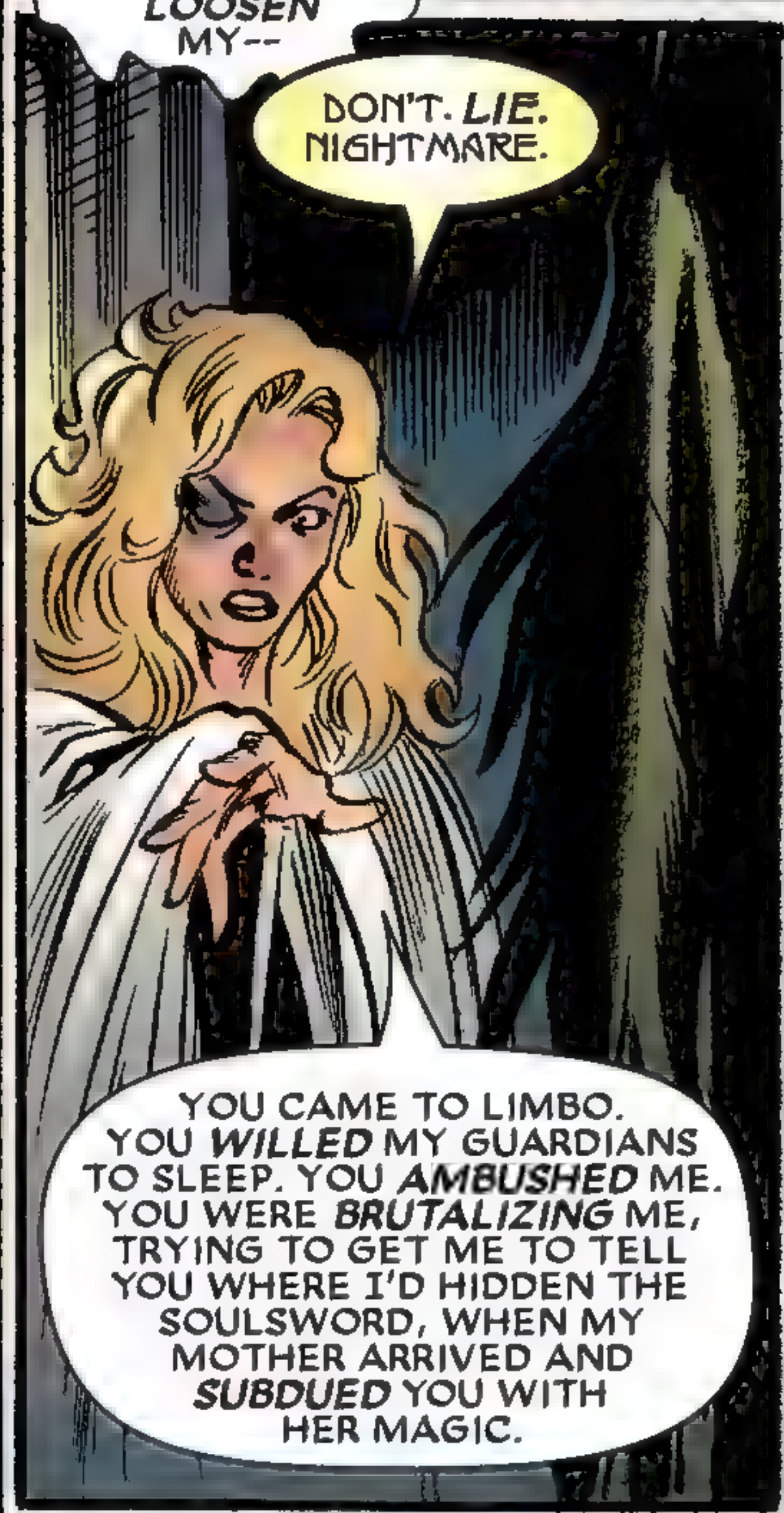
THE SOULSWORD? HOW...BAROQUE-SOUNDING.



MY DEAR LADIES, I'VE NO UNEARTHLY IDEA WHAT YOU'RE GOING ON ABOUT.

NOW IF YOU'LL KINDLY LOOSEN MY--

DON'T. LIE. NIGHTMARE.



YOU CAME TO LIMBO. YOU WILLED MY GUARDIANS TO SLEEP. YOU AMBUSHED ME. YOU WERE BRUTALIZING ME, TRYING TO GET ME TO TELL YOU WHERE I'D HIDDEN THE SOULSWORD, WHEN MY MOTHER ARRIVED AND SUBDUED YOU WITH HER MAGIC.

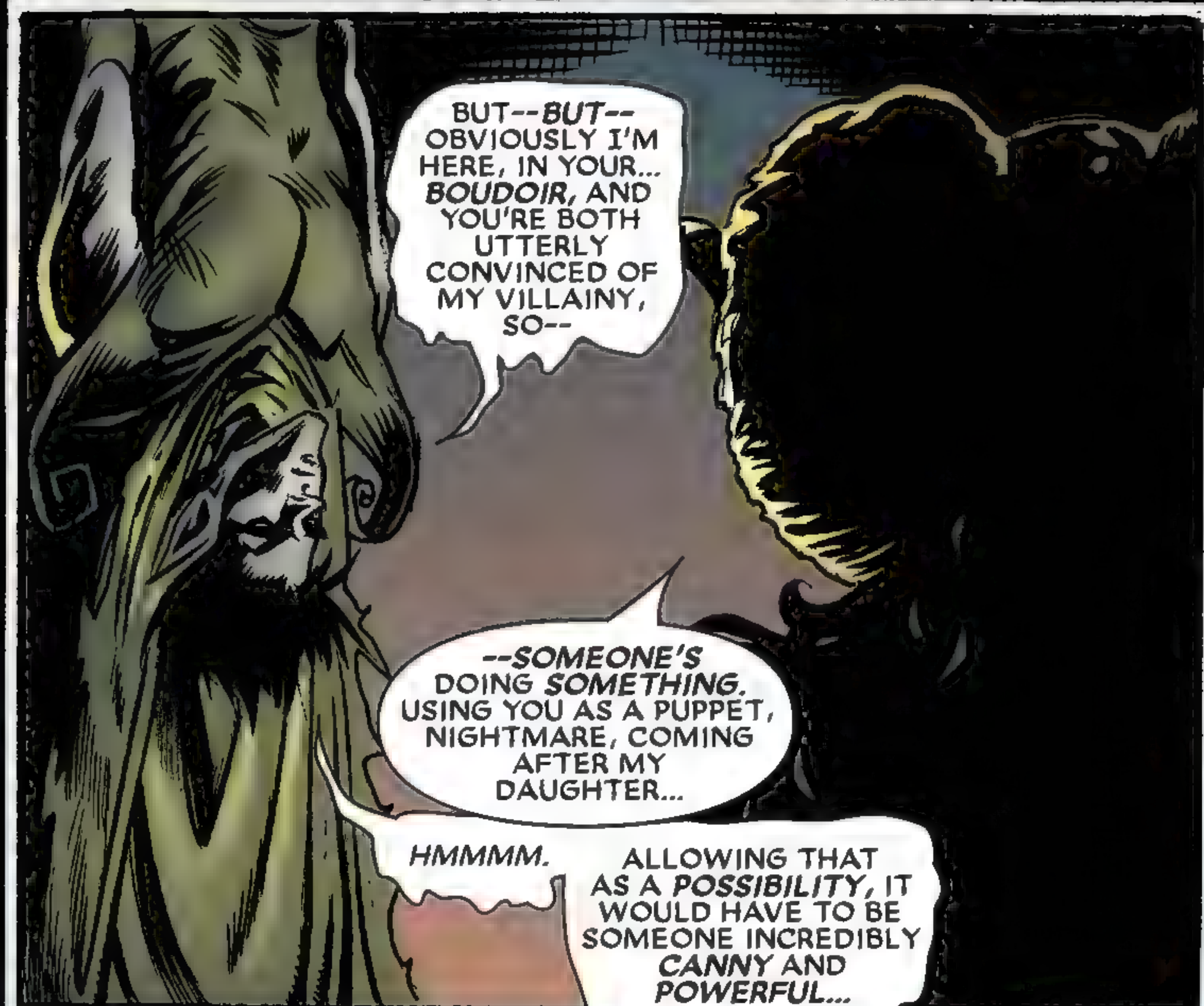


YOU'RE SAYING WORDS, AND I'M HEARING THEM, BUT AGAIN--I HAVEN'T THE FOGGIEST WHAT YOU MEAN.

I DON'T RECALL DOING ANY OF THOSE THINGS.

HE'S NOT LYING, MOTHER. THE SPELL I PUT HIM UNDER--

--WAS SUPERFLUOUS. SINCE, AS EVERYONE KNOWS, NIGHTMARES NEVER LIE.



BUT--BUT-- OBVIOUSLY I'M HERE, IN YOUR... BOUDOIR, AND YOU'RE BOTH UTTERLY CONVINCED OF MY VILLAINY, SO--

--SOMEONE'S DOING SOMETHING. USING YOU AS A PUPPET, NIGHTMARE, COMING AFTER MY DAUGHTER...

HMMMM.

ALLOWING THAT AS A POSSIBILITY, IT WOULD HAVE TO BE SOMEONE INCREDIBLY CANNY AND POWERFUL...



NO, MOTHER, NOT AFTER ME-- AFTER THE SOULSWORD.

SOME THINGS YOU BURY-- YOU HIDE--AND PRAY THEY'LL STAY HIDDEN, BUT THEY NEVER DO...

MOTHER, WAIT, DID YOU...?

I JUST FELT... A SHIFTING HAPPEN, ALONG LIMBO'S FAULTLINES...

I DID, AS WELL.

BY THE EYE OF AGOMOTTO, DID WE JUST HAVE A TEAM-UP?

MOTHER, IF SOMEONE'S TRYING TO GET HOLD OF THE SOULSWORD...

"...WE HAVE
TO WARN KURT,
WHEREVER
HE IS."

CLIMBING THE STAIRS
UP TO JARDINE'S TRAILER,
THE FIRST THING THAT HITS
ME IS THE SMELL.

THIS WHOLE
PLACE REEKS
OF...

JARDINE?
ARE YOU...?

BEFORE HE
SPEAKS, I HEAR
IT. AN INTENSE,
INCESSANT...

...BUZZING?
OF...FLIES?

N...
NIGHTCRAWLER...

YOU...YOU
GOT A FUNNY
IDEA OF WHAT
TWO WEEKS
IS...

I...I MEANT TO KEEP
MY PROMISE AND COME
BACK, BUT...

(YOUR BROTHER
STEPHEN WENT ON
A RAMPAGE--KILLED A
GROUP OF CHILDREN--
THEN YOU KILLED
HIM...)

...JARDINE,
WHAT
HAPPENED
HERE?

TIME
HAPPENED,
YOU...

COUGH,
COUGH

TIME...AND
THE SWAMP GREW
UP AROUND US, AND
PEOPLE JUST...
STOPPED...COMING...

HE LOOKS--
AND SMELLS--
DISEASED.

AND WHAT ARE
THESE FLIES--A
CLOUD OF THEM--
SWARMING
AROUND HIM...?



JUST ME
AND A HANDFUL
OF PEOPLE
LEFT...

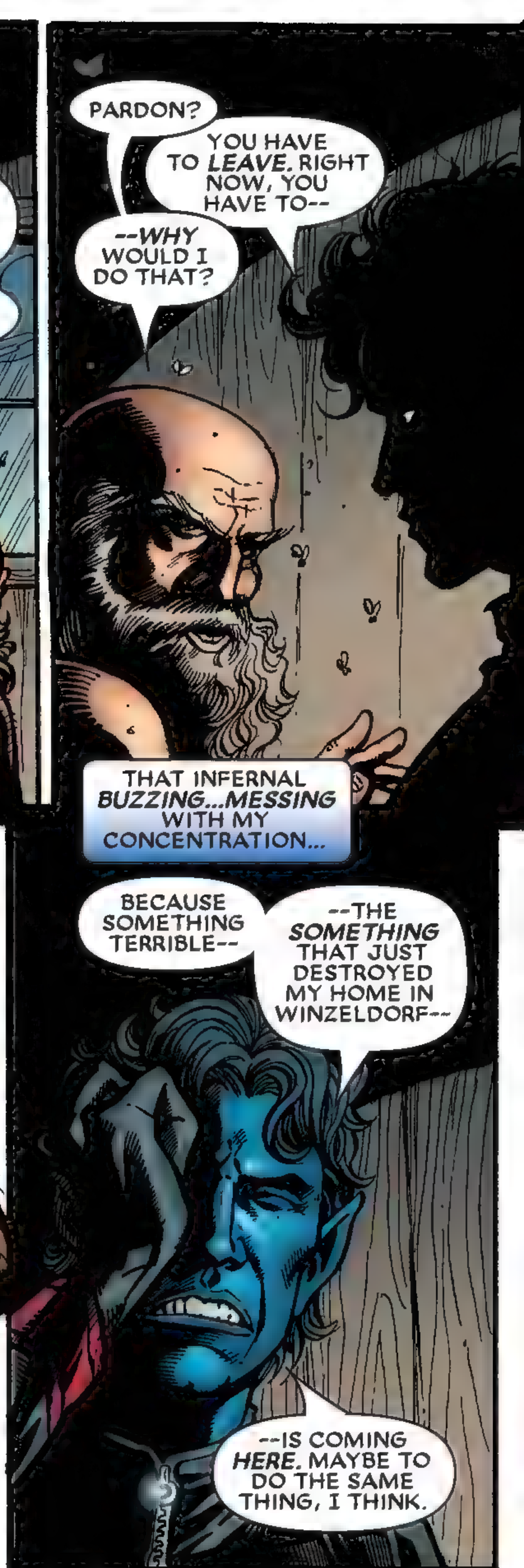
COUGH,
COUGH

...A SKELETON
CREW BARELY
HOLDING ON...

JARDINE,
LISTEN TO
ME. YOU--

--AND
EVERYONE
ELSE THAT'S
STILL HERE--

--YOU HAVE
TO GO.



PARDON?

YOU HAVE
TO LEAVE, RIGHT
NOW, YOU
HAVE TO--

--WHY
WOULD I
DO THAT?

THAT INFERNAL
BUZZING...MESSING
WITH MY
CONCENTRATION...

BECAUSE
SOMETHING
TERRIBLE--

--THE
SOMETHING
THAT JUST
DESTROYED
MY HOME IN
WINZELDORF--

--IS COMING
HERE, MAYBE TO
DO THE SAME
THING, I THINK.



"MAYBE"?
"YOU THINK"?

FOR GOD'S
SAKE, JARDINE,
YOU DON'T
UNDERSTAND--

(NEITHER DO YOU,
NIGHTCRAWLER.)

--YOU'LL
DIE!

"DIE"?

LOOK
AT ME,
FREAK...

AT THIS
POINT, DON'T
YOU THINK I'D
WELCOME
DEATH?

BUT--
EVERYONE
ELSE!

HANGERS-
ON AND
FREELoadERS...



"...NO,
NIGHTCRAWLER.
IF SOMETHING
IS COMING..."

"...LET IT, I SAY,
AND DAMN US
ALL TO HELL."

⊗ TO BE CONTINUED...

MARVEL

10

WISHMASTER



KNA

THE WINDING WAY IV
AGUIRRE-SACASA • ROBERTSON • RAMOS

US

He's your best friend *and* the monster that lives under your bed! And he must go where the other X-Men won't—into the shadows that have always called to him!

PREVIOUSLY

NIGHTCRAWLER

"The Winding Way"



Strange and mysterious have been the recent days of KURT WAGNER, a.k.a. NIGHTCRAWLER. He has been plagued with dreams of his past—from his early days in the German circus to his days as an X-Man. No part of his past has been left untouched.

To help understand these dreams, Kurt goes to Germany, where many of his dreams resonate. Once there, Kurt, WOLVERINE, and CHRISTINE PALMER discover the circus from Nightcrawler's youth in flames! Something mysterious has destroyed the entire circus. Kurt and his companions then fly to Florida, where Kurt had performed in another circus when he was young. Kurt wants to ensure that whatever happened in Germany doesn't repeat itself in Florida.

Meanwhile, in the realm of LIMBO, Kurt's foster sister and the ruler of Limbo, AMANDA SEFTON, has been ambushed and tortured by the hideous demon known as NIGHTMARE, who was demanding the location of the SOULSWORD. However, when Amanda's mother (MARGALI SZARDOS) shows up to free her daughter, Nightmare has no recollection of even wanting the SOULSWORD. Needless to say, something strange and mysterious is afoot, with Nightcrawler smack-dab in the middle!

THE ABSURDITY OF THE SITUATION IS ALMOST UNBEARABLE.

YEARS AGO, THE **DISEASED**, FLY-BITTEN MAN STANDING IN FRONT OF ME--**AMOS JARDINE**--HELD ME HOSTAGE, DRUGGED ME AND MADE ME PERFORM IN HIS **FREAK SHOW** OF THE DAMNED. NOW--

PLEASE, JARDINE, I'M TRYING TO HELP YOU!

SO YOU KEEP SAYING, BUT...

I DON'T WANT ANY HELP.

COUGH, COUGH

BUT THEY'RE COMING TO HURT YOU!

WHO IS?

THE SAME THINGS THAT TORE APART MY CIRCUS IN WINZELDORF.

I DON'T KNOW-- CREATURES.

WHY, THOUGH? WHY ME?

BECAUSE FOR SOME REASON THEY'RE ATTACKING MY PAST.

I'M NOT SURE. BECAUSE I LIVED HERE FOR A TIME AND THEY'RE LOOKING FOR...

WHAT? LOOKING FOR WHAT?

ONE OF THE SURVIVORS IN WINZELDORF SAID SOMETHING ABOUT--

--A SWORD, I THINK, BUT...





...IT DOESN'T
MATTER RIGHT
NOW!

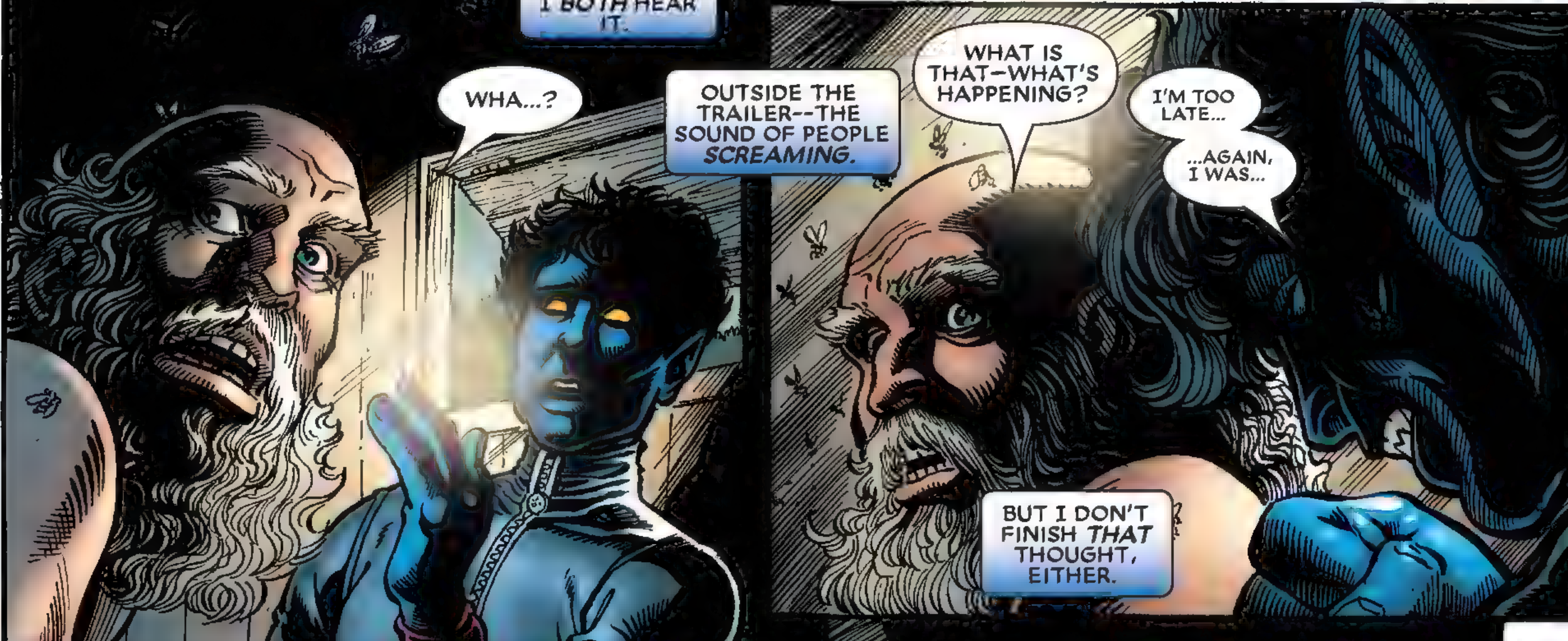
LET'S
JUST GET
YOU--

--AND
EVERYONE ELSE
WHO'S STILL
HERE--

--SOMEWHERE
SAFE, AND THEN
WE'LL SORT
THROUGH THIS
CONF--

I DON'T FINISH
THE WORD.

JARDINE AND
I BOTH HEAR
IT.



WHA...?

OUTSIDE THE
TRAILER--THE
SOUND OF PEOPLE
SCREAMING.

WHAT IS
THAT--WHAT'S
HAPPENING?

I'M TOO
LATE...

...AGAIN,
I WAS...

BUT I DON'T
FINISH THAT
THOUGHT,
EITHER.



THE TRAILER SHIFTS, EVER
SO SLIGHTLY. ITS BOARDS
AND BEAMS CREAK, LIKE
AN OLD HOUSE SETTLING.

WHAT HAVE
YOU BROUGHT HERE,
NIGHTCRAWLER?

IT FEELS LIKE THE
EYE OF A HURRICANE
PASSING OVER US--



ANSWER
ME, FREAK.

WHAT
HAVE YOU--?

I DON'T LOOK
AT HIM--DON'T
ANSWER HIM--

THE WINDING WAY: PART 4 OF 5 WICKED THINGS

--THE
HURRICANE
DOES.

MY MIND BARELY
HAS TIME TO REGISTER:
"THAT'S THE MAN-
THING!"--

JARDINE,
GET BEHIND--

--BEFORE IT'S ON ME,
MOVING FASTER THAN
I WOULD'VE THOUGHT
POSSIBLE.

ROBERTO AGUIRRE-SACASA WRITER	DARICK ROBERTSON PENCILER	RODNEY RAMOS INKER	AVALLON'S MATT MILLA COLORIST	VC'S RUS WOOTON LETTERER
SEAN RYAN ASST. EDITOR	NICK LOWE ASSOC. EDITOR	MIKE MARTS EDITOR	JOE QUESADA EDITOR IN CHIEF	DAN BUCKLEY PUBLISHER



OUR EYES LOCK, LIKE DOGS,
WHAT THE MAN-THING SENSES
IS FEAR--TRIGGERING ITS
BURNING TOUCH.

PLEASE--
IF YOU CAN
UNDERSTAND
ME--

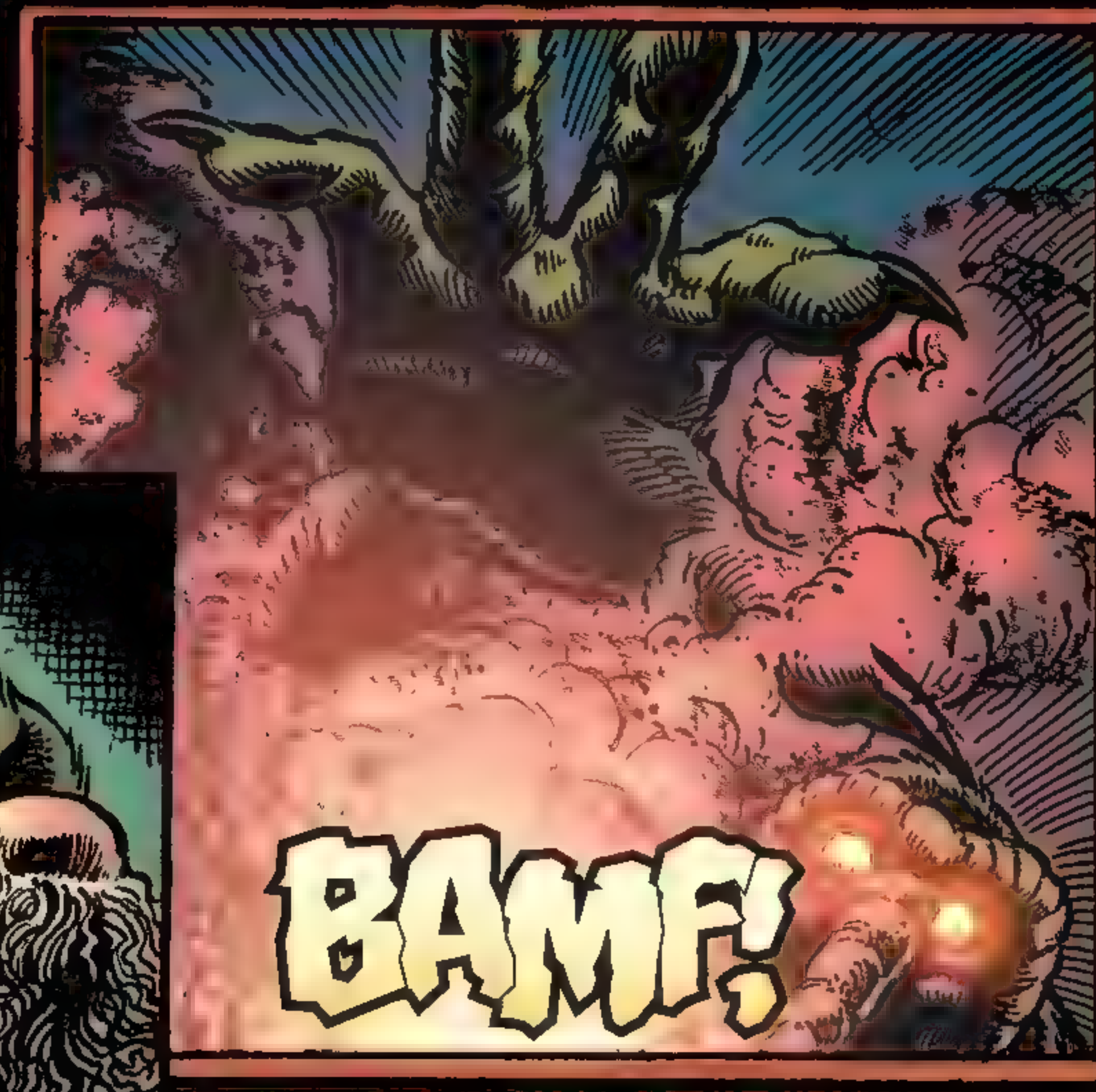


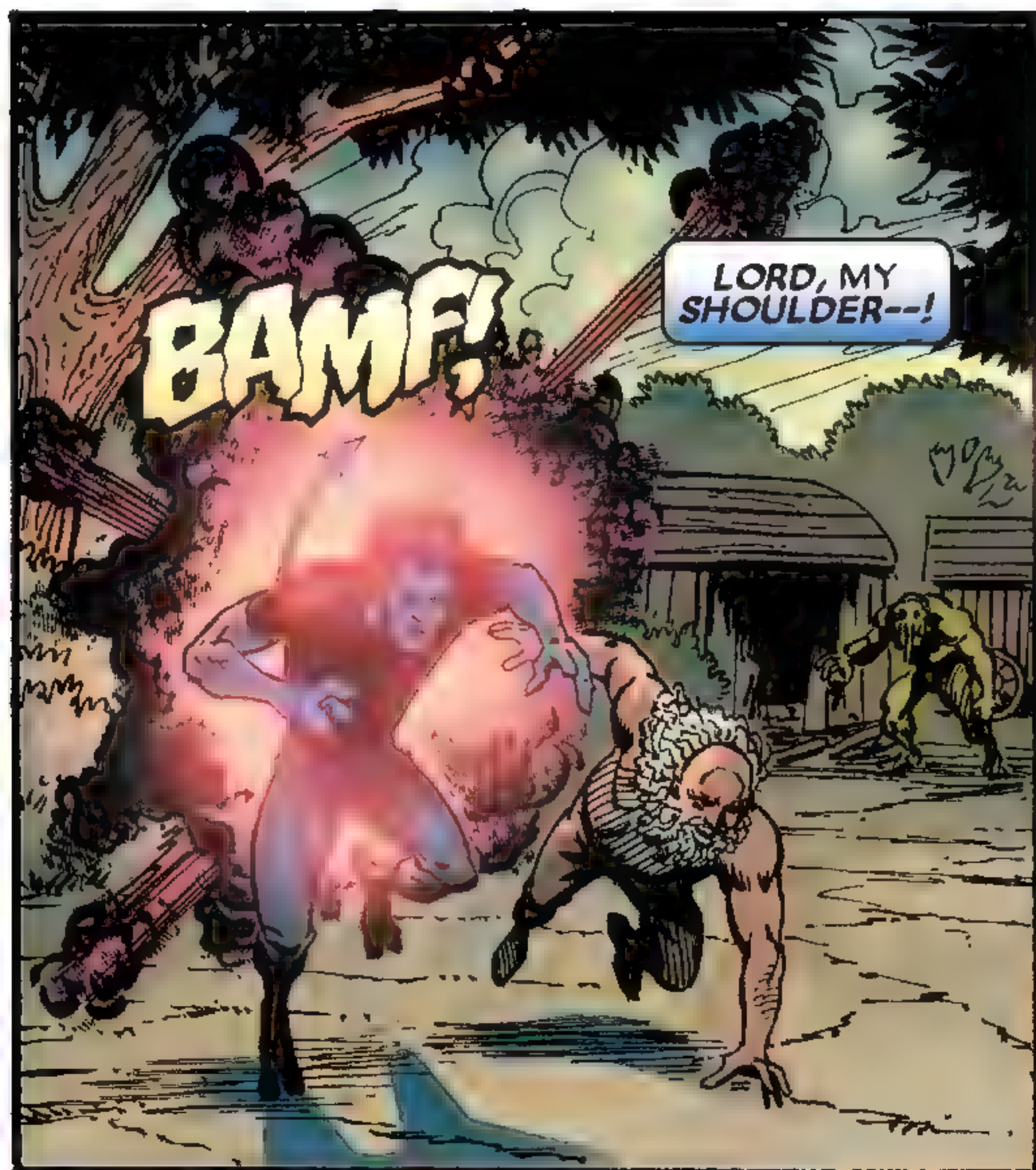
I'M A HERO, I TELL
MYSELF. I SHOULDN'T
FEEL FEAR. BUT...



HANG--

WHAT
ARE YOU--?







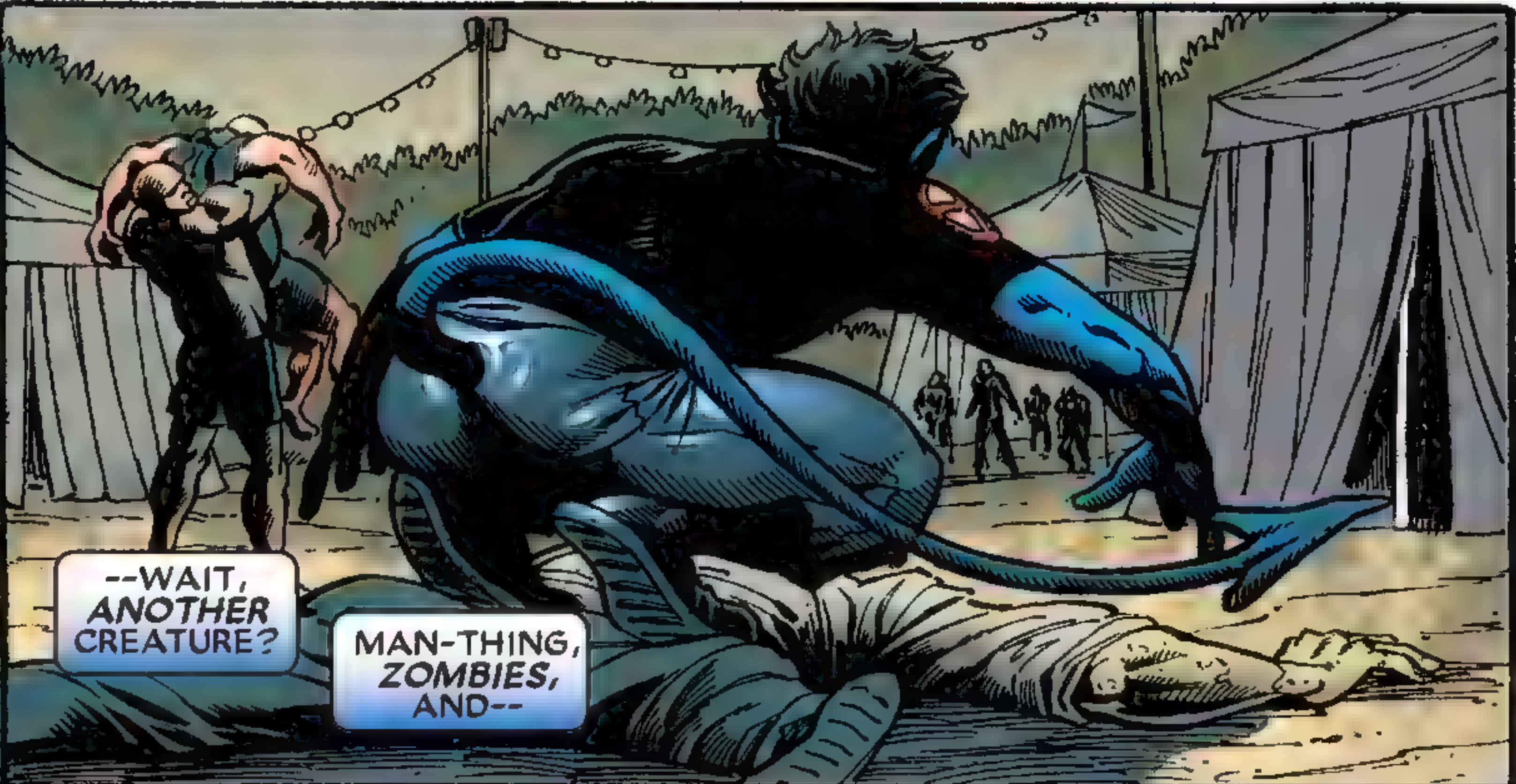
--WHAT SWORD
THEY'RE LOOKING
FOR.



UNLESS
IT'S--

GO--RUN--
HIDE!

--THE
SOULSWORD.
MARGALI AND
AMANDA'S--



--WAIT,
ANOTHER
CREATURE?

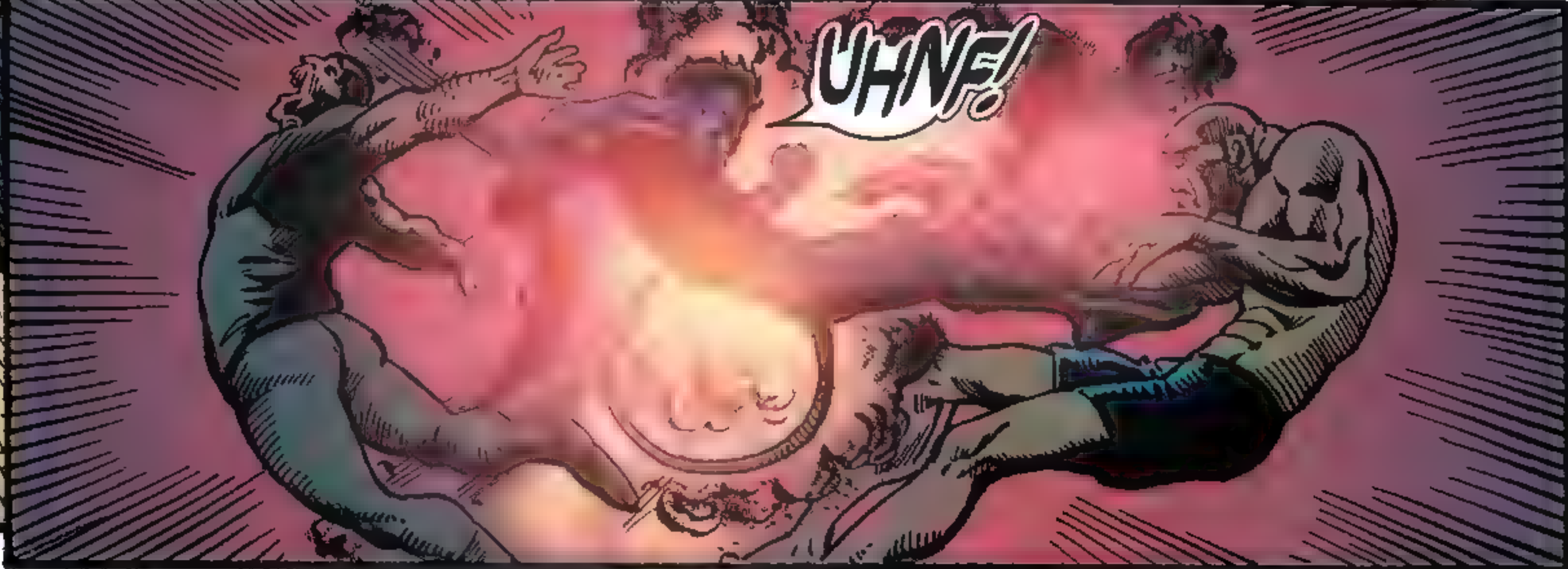
MAN-THING,
ZOMBIES,
AND--



FER A
STRONG
MAN, YER
NOT--

HUH?

BAMF!



UHNE!



ALL RIGHT, THE STRONG MAN'S SAFE, BUT, UHM...

...NOW WHAT?

WHO'RE YOU SUPPOSED TA BE--FURRY SMURF?

...

WHAT DOES COLOSSUS LIKE TO SAY?



"SOMETIMES THE BEST THING TO DO TO A PROBLEM--

CRACK!

"--IS HIT IT AS HARD AS YOU CAN."



HEH.

NAHHHH, YER DEAD MEAT, SMURF.

HE'S BIG. AND TOUGH. BUT--



WHA--?



THUDD!

--NOT THE BRIGHTEST STAR IN THE FIRMAMENT--

--AS EMMA FROST LIKES TO SAY.



OHHHH...
I'M GONNA
LIKE EATING
YER BRAINS.

HE'S NOT GOING DOWN,
NO MATTER HOW HARD
I HIT HIM. AND--

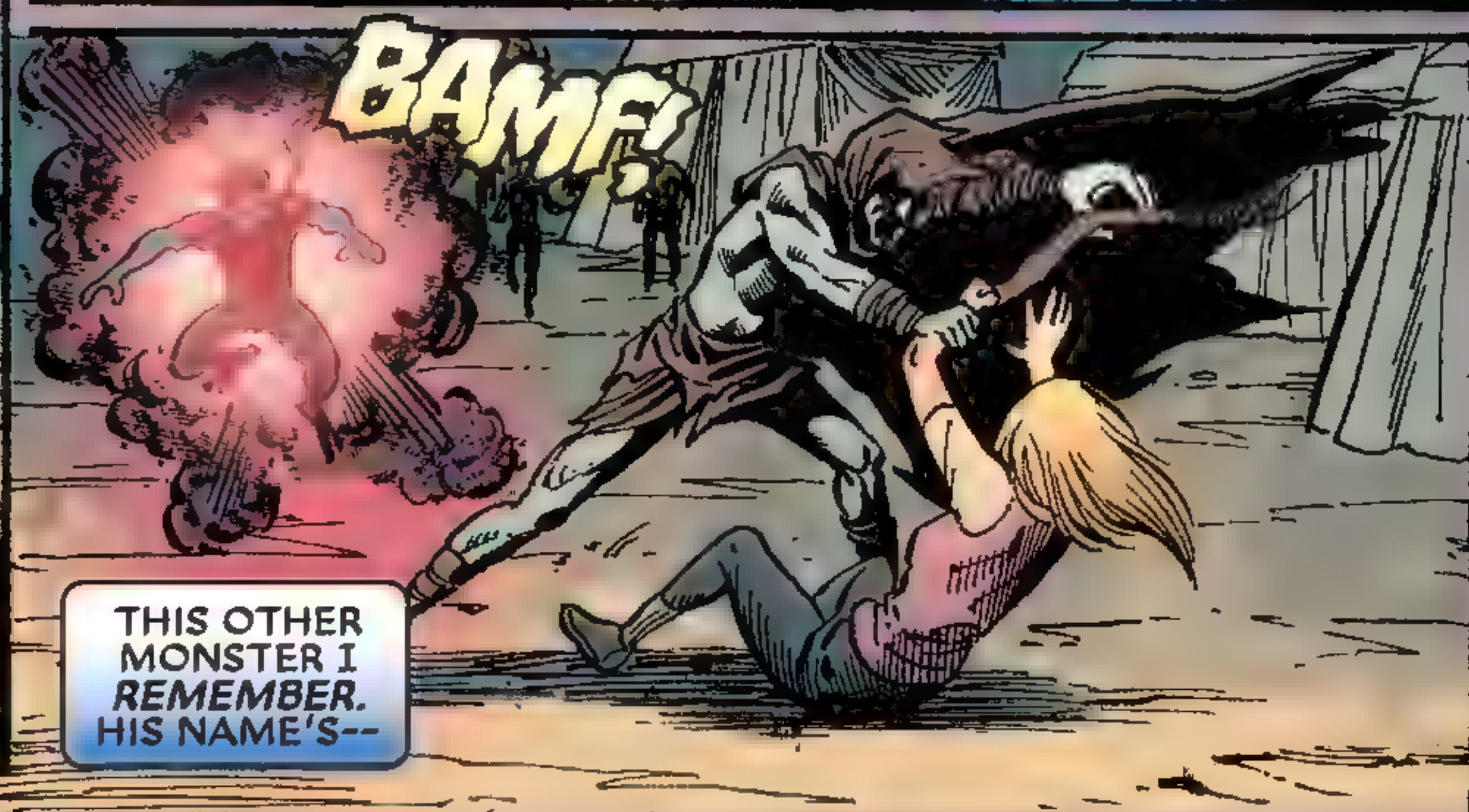
--I'M WASTING TIME.
HE'S NOT THE ONE
ORCHESTRATING THIS
ATTACK, AND PEOPLE--

NO!
PLEASE,
GOD, NO!



--PEOPLE ARE
STARTING TO
DIE!

WAITAMINUTE.
WHERE DO YOU
THINK--?



THIS OTHER
MONSTER I
REMEMBER.
HIS NAME'S--



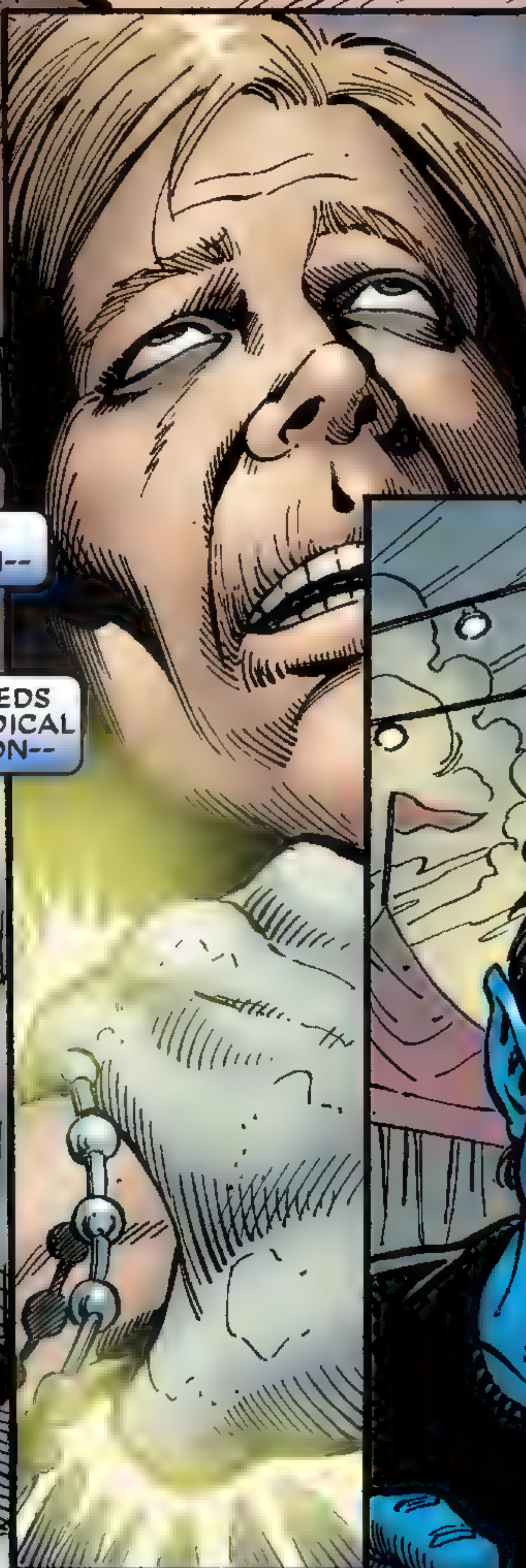
CARRION!

WHO LITERALLY
HAS A TOUCH OF
DEATH.

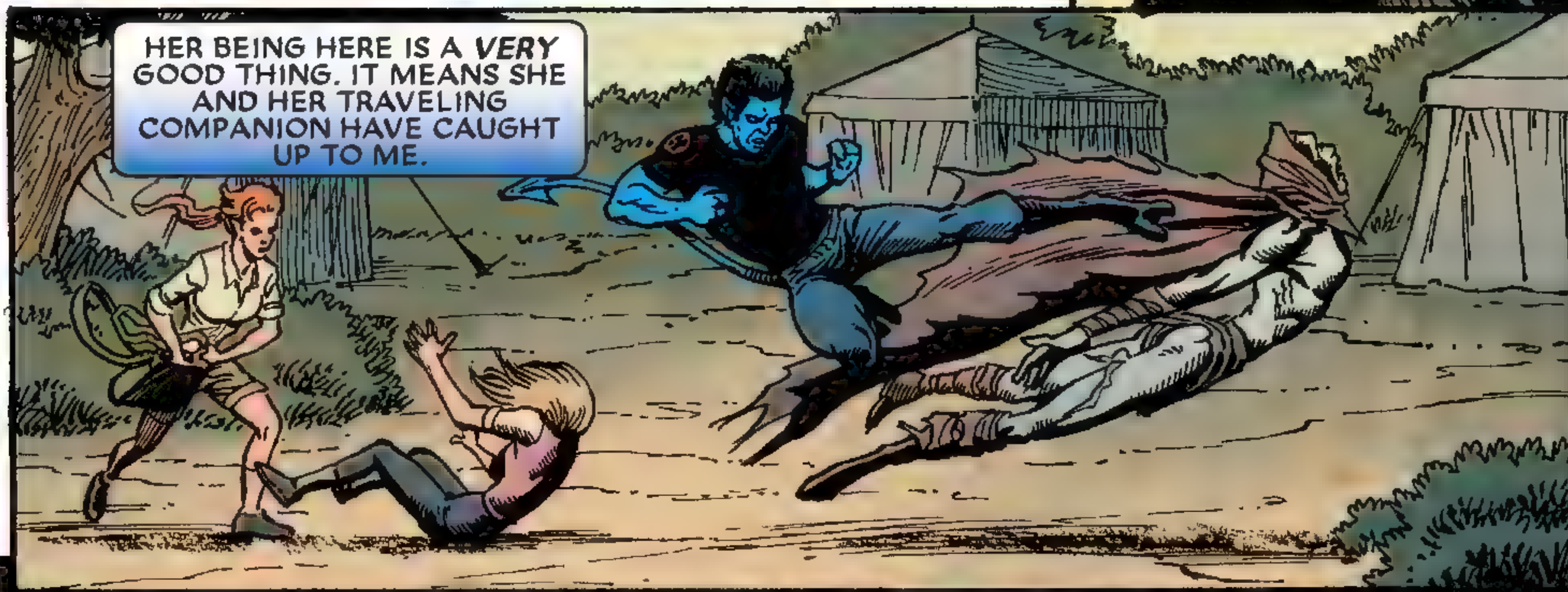
WHOSE HANDS
WASTE YOU
AWAY.

THAT
WOMAN--

--SHE NEEDS
HELP--MEDICAL
ATTENTION--



IT'S
ALL RIGHT,
KURT--





...IS HORDES OF RAMPAGING ZOMBIES!



LUCKILY, I AIN'T GOT NO PLACE ELSE TO BE.

SNIKT

SNIKT

LOGAN CAN MORE THAN TAKE CARE OF HIMSELF AND THEM, ALLOWING ME TO FOCUS ON--



--NO MORE GAMES, CARRION, NO MORE HURTING PEOPLE!

WHY ARE YOU DOING THIS?

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR?

YOUR DEATH...

TYPICAL, BUT IT CAN'T BE THAT SIMPLE BECAUSE--



--IF THAT'S THE CASE, WHY NOT JUST COME FOR ME? WHY ATTACK EVERY PLACE I'VE EVER LIVED?

THE SWORD...



ANOTHER MENTION OF WHAT HAS TO BE--

--THE SOULSWORD?

...I ASK, BUT THEN THE STRANGEST THING HAPPENS.



CARRION...

...FOR SOME
REASON...

...FALLS...

...ASLEEP?

WHAT
NOW?

CARRION'S NOT THE ONLY
ONE. *THROUGHOUT* JARDINE'S
CARNIVAL, I'LL DISCOVER.

ON THE MIDWAY, GATOR
GRANT SUDDENLY STARTS
TO SWAY ON HIS FEET...

...AND SECONDS
LATER *COLLAPSES*
INTO A SNORING
HEAP.



BACK AT THE TRAILERS, THE MAN-THING'S RAMPAGE GOES QUIET...

...AS STILL AS A LAKE.



BEHIND THE TENTS, WOLVERINE'S FUN IS CUT SHORT...

OH, YOU GOTTA BE KIDDING ME.

...AS THE UNDEAD SOLDIERS RETURN TO THEIR...NATURAL STATE.



CARRION SLIPS FROM MY GRASP, AN UNHOLY DEAD WEIGHT...

...AND I WATCH, AS ONE BY ONE, JARDINE'S CIRCUS PERFORMERS FLEE...

...VANISH INTO THE SURROUNDING SWAMPS...



...LEAVING ONLY THE THREE OF US (FOUR, COUNTING JARDINE), AWAKE AND CONFUSED.

ALL OF THEM, KURT, ALL THE CREATURES...

...ASLEEP LIKE BABIES.

(BABY MONSTERS, BUT YOU KNOW WHAT I'M SAYING.)



WHAT'RE YOU...?

COUGH, COUGH

...HOW'D YOU DO THAT, FREAK?

HE DIDN'T DO ANYTHING...

...WE
DID.

FOR SOMEONE WHO'S NOT
OFFICIALLY IN THE SUPER-
HERO BUSINESS, MY FOSTER-
MOTHER MARGALI CERTAINLY
KNOWS HOW TO MAKE AN
ENTRANCE.





AND THIS IS...?
I MEAN, THEY ARE...?

...I BELIEVE THE TERM IS "DEUS EX MACHINA," CHRISTINE.

HOW ELSE TO DESCRIBE THE ELEVENTH HOUR APPEARANCE OF MARGALI, MY EX-GIRLFRIEND AMANDA SEFTON (A SORCERESS IN HER OWN RIGHT), AND...



...YOU CAN THANK NIGHTMARE FOR PUTTING THE CREATURES TO SLEEP.

IT WASN'T HARD. MOST OF THEM WERE, IN FACT, DEAD, WHICH IS--OF COURSE--THE BIGGEST, DEEPEST SLEEP OF THEM ALL.

THOUGH I WILL TAKE CREDIT FOR THE DREAM I TRAPPED THEM IN. THEY'RE ALL UNDERWATER, BENEATH A SHEET OF ICE THEY CAN'T BREAK...



SWEET, BUT--

--YOU DON'T USUALLY FIGHT ON THE SIDE OF THE ANGELS, NIGHTMARE. WHY TODAY?

OH, HONESTLY.

I'M AN IMMORTAL ENTITY, NIGHTCRAWLER, NOT A...PERVERSE MEMBER OF YOUR ROGUES' GALLERY. I GO WHEREVER I'M NEEDED.

AND EVEN THE DENSEST PARANORMAL CAN TELL YOU...

WHATEVER'S HAPPENING IS ENORMOUS, SON.

BEYOND ENORMOUS.

THERE HAVE BEEN...RUMBLINGS THROUGHOUT MY REALM--THROUGHOUT LIMBO--AND THE OTHER ASTRAL PLANES.



RUMBLINGS...?

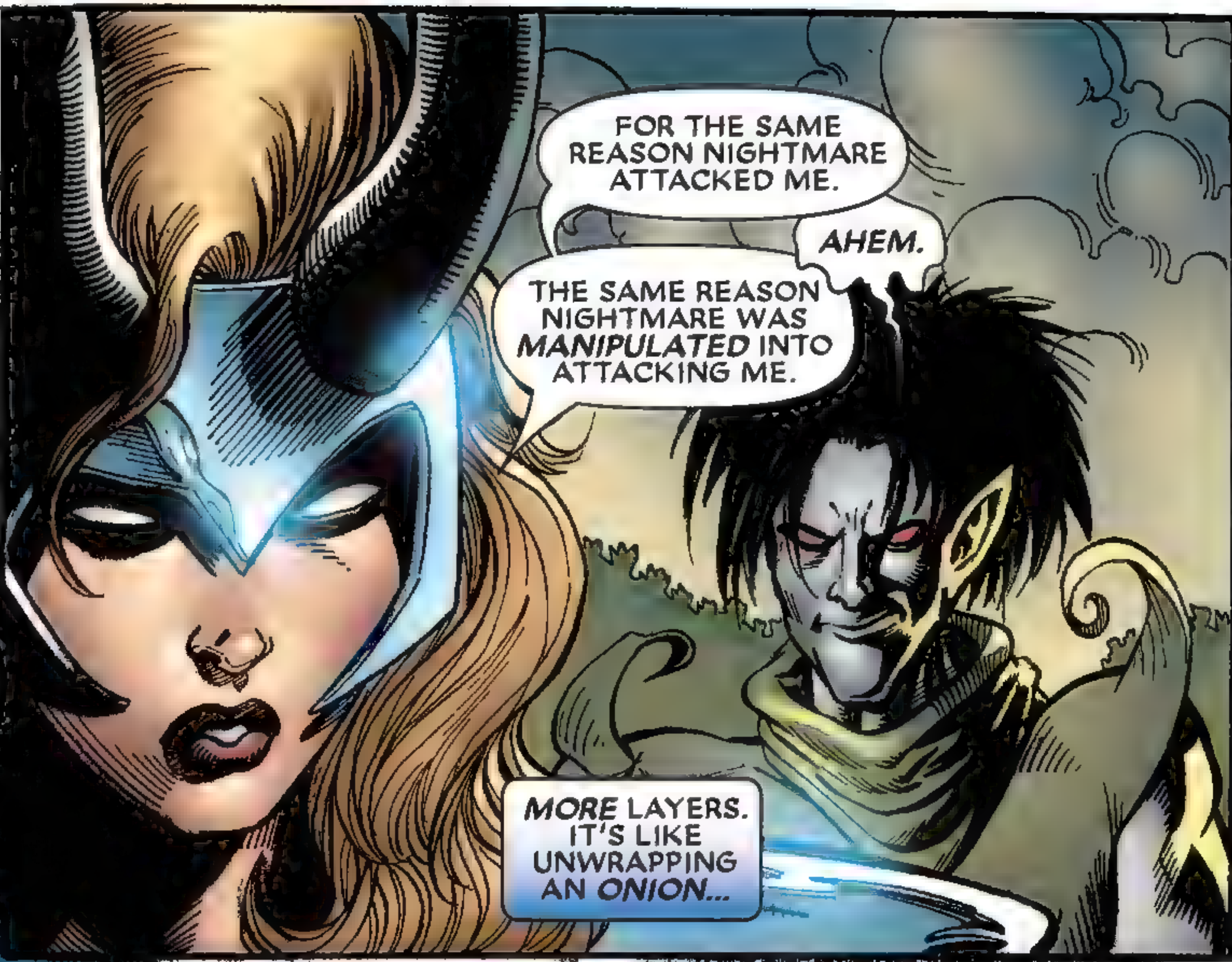
OF A SERIOUS... IMBALANCE. A SHIFT ON A COSMIC SCALE.

I HATE THIS TOUCHY-FEELY MAGIC STUFF...



BUT...THESE THINGS ARE HAPPENING TO ME. VERMIN ATTACKED ME. CARRION--MAN-THING--THE OTHERS--THEY ALL CAME AFTER MY PAST.

I KEEP ASKING THIS, BUT WHY?

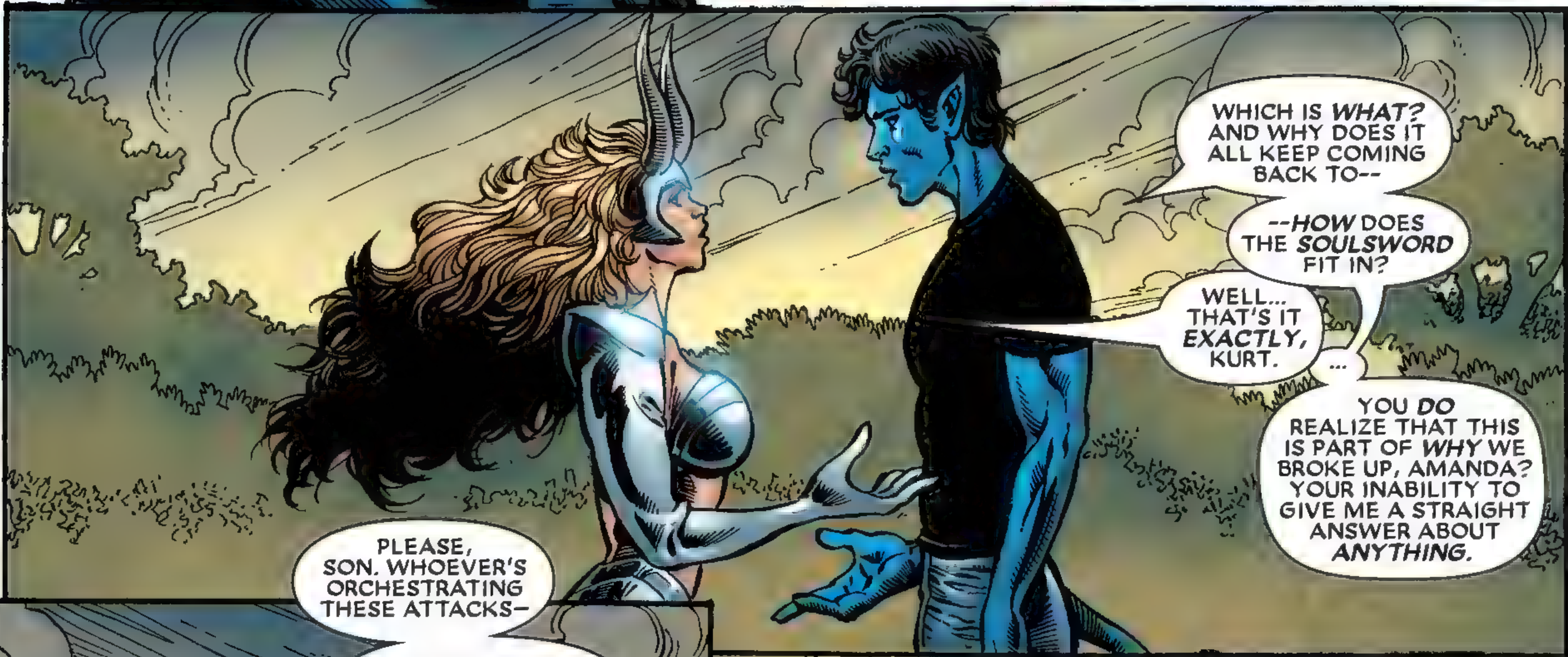


FOR THE SAME REASON NIGHTMARE ATTACKED ME.

AHEM.

THE SAME REASON NIGHTMARE WAS MANIPULATED INTO ATTACKING ME.

MORE LAYERS. IT'S LIKE UNWRAPPING AN ONION...



WHICH IS WHAT? AND WHY DOES IT ALL KEEP COMING BACK TO--

--HOW DOES THE SOULSWORD FIT IN?

WELL... THAT'S IT EXACTLY, KURT.

YOU DO REALIZE THAT THIS IS PART OF WHY WE BROKE UP, AMANDA? YOUR INABILITY TO GIVE ME A STRAIGHT ANSWER ABOUT ANYTHING.

PLEASE, SON. WHOEVER'S ORCHESTRATING THESE ATTACKS--

--AND I MEAN SOMEONE INCREDIBLY POWERFUL, WORKING BEHIND THE SCENES--

--IS TRYING TO GET TO THE SOULSWORD THROUGH YOU.



I HEAR THE WORDS MY MOTHER IS SAYING.

I DON'T YET GRASP THEIR FULL MEANING--

--BUT A COLD WAVE, A PREMONITION, WASHES OVER ME--

BLOOD WILL HAVE MORE BLOOD.



THE SOULSWORD...

I KNOW SOME THINGS ABOUT IT...



IT'S A WEAPON, KURT...

...AN OCCULT WEAPON.

SORCERERS USE IT TO CUT DOWN ANY WHO BLOCK THEIR PROGRESS ALONG THE WINDING WAY-- THE PATH TOWARDS MAGICAL ENLIGHTENMENT AND EMPOWERMENT.

"LIKE THE SPEAR OF DESTINY, IT HAS PASSED THROUGH MANY HANDS, SERVED MANY MASTERS..."



ILLYANA RASPUTIN WAS ITS ORIGINAL CUSTODIAN. VICTOR VON DOOM WRESTLED IT FROM KITTY PRIDE WHEN SHE WAS ITS KEEPER. I POSSESSED IT ONCE. DEMONS AND SORCERERS HAVE KILLED WHOLE ARMIES TO OBTAIN IT...



MOST RECENTLY, I ASSUMED ITS HEAVY BURDEN.

WHEN I BECAME THE LATEST MAGIK, THE LATEST GUARDIAN OF LIMBO.

SO YOU'VE GOT IT, THEN?



NO... KURT DOES.

ME?

NO, I DON'T.



...
PLEASE
DON'T GET
UPSET, SON,
BUT...

THE
SOULSWORD
HAS **CORRUPTING**
PROPERTIES. IF
THERE'S EVEN A
WHIFF OF EVIL IN
WHOMEVER
HOLDS IT...

IT'S ALSO LIKE
A **LIGHTNING ROD**,
ATTRACTING THE
WORST OF THE
WORLD, THE MOST
POWER-MAD
BEINGS...

IF I'D KEPT IT WITH
ME IN LIMBO, WHERE IT'S
TRADITIONALLY HOUSED,
THE NETHER-REALMS
WOULD BE UNDER
CONSTANT ATTACK.



SO YOU
GAVE IT TO
HIM AND
HE'S
HIDING IT.

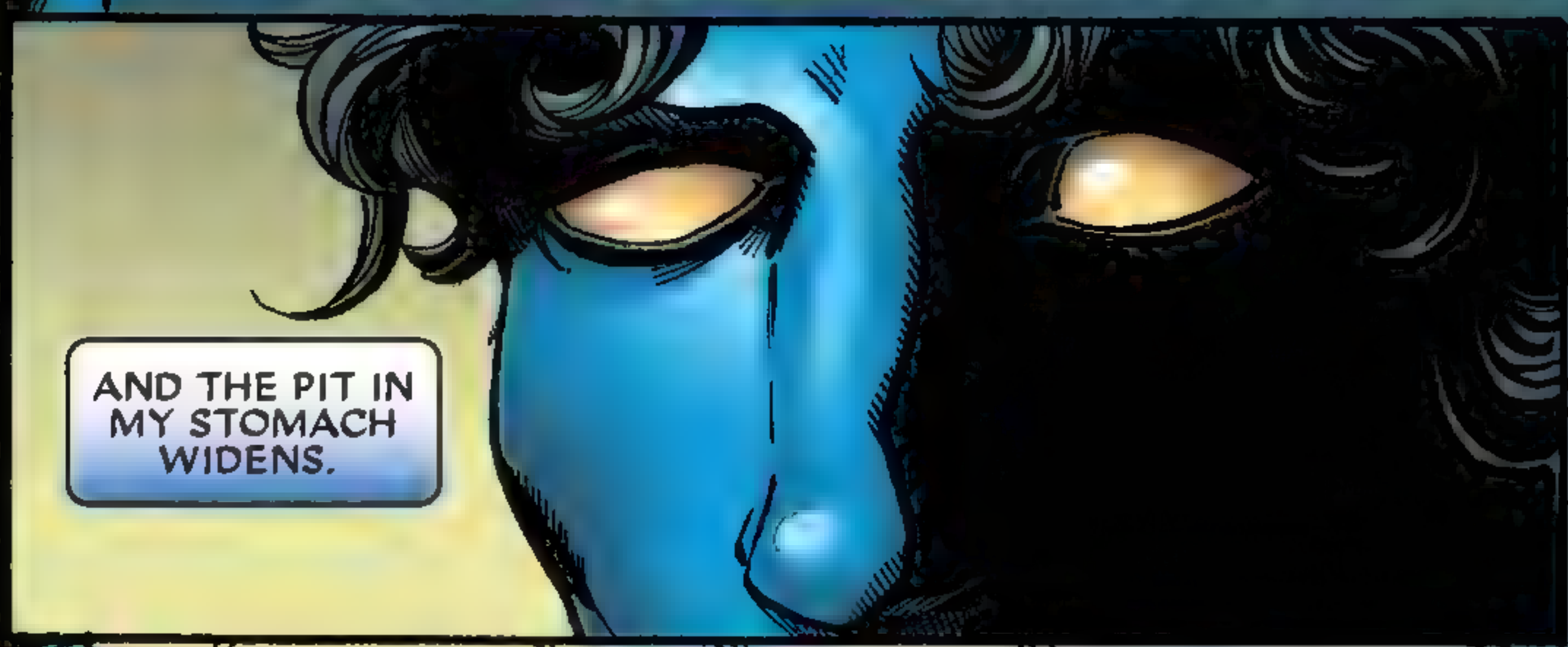
AND THAT'S
WHY I'VE BEEN--
AND MY HOMES
HAVE BEEN--
UNDER ASSAULT...

BUT...I DON'T
HAVE IT. I'VE
NEVER HAD IT.



...
WHEN YOU
DREAM, WHEN
YOU **REMEMBER**, KURT,
DON'T YOU SEE...A
TRUNK? BURIED IN YOUR...
SUBCONSCIOUS?

I...
I DO,
YES.



AND THE PIT IN
MY STOMACH
WIDENS.



THAT TRUNK IS A PSYCHOLOGICAL...**ECHO**
OF THE TRUTH. IT'S WHAT YOUR ENEMY--OR
ENEMIES--HAVE BEEN "SEEING" IN YOUR
THOUGHTS. WHAT THEY'VE BEEN LOOKING
FOR. AN ACTUAL TRUNK YOU MIGHT HAVE
LEFT SOMEWHERE, WHEN REALLY...

WAIT--
WHAT TRUTH,
AMANDA?

TRULY,
THIS COULD
GO ON FOR
HOURS.

THE
SWORD'S
INSIDE YOU,
NIGHTCRAWLER.
IT'S **BEEN** INSIDE
YOU FOR...WELL,
A VERY LONG
TIME.



YOU'RE...
YOU'RE LYING.
SOMEONE HERE
IS--

NO,
SON.

WE HAVE
BEEN KEEPING
THE TRUTH HIDDEN
FROM YOU, BUT...
WE'RE NOT
LYING NOW.



HERE.
LET ME
SHOW
YOU.



AND MY FOSTER-MOTHER
REACHES INTO MY CHEST
AND I REMEMBER A GAME
STEPHEN, AMANDA, AND
I USED TO PLAY AS
CHILDREN.

IN THE DARK, WE HELD
PEELED GRAPES IN OUR
HANDS AND PRETENDED
THEY WERE EYEBALLS.
COOKED SPAGHETTI
NOODLES AND TOLD
EACH OTHER IT WAS
DEAD MAN'S BRAINS.



IT DOESN'T HURT AT ALL,
WHEN SHE PULLS IT OUT
OF ME LIKE ARTHUR
FREEING EXCALIBUR FROM
ITS STONE.



ONCE IT'S
REMOVED,
THOUGH...

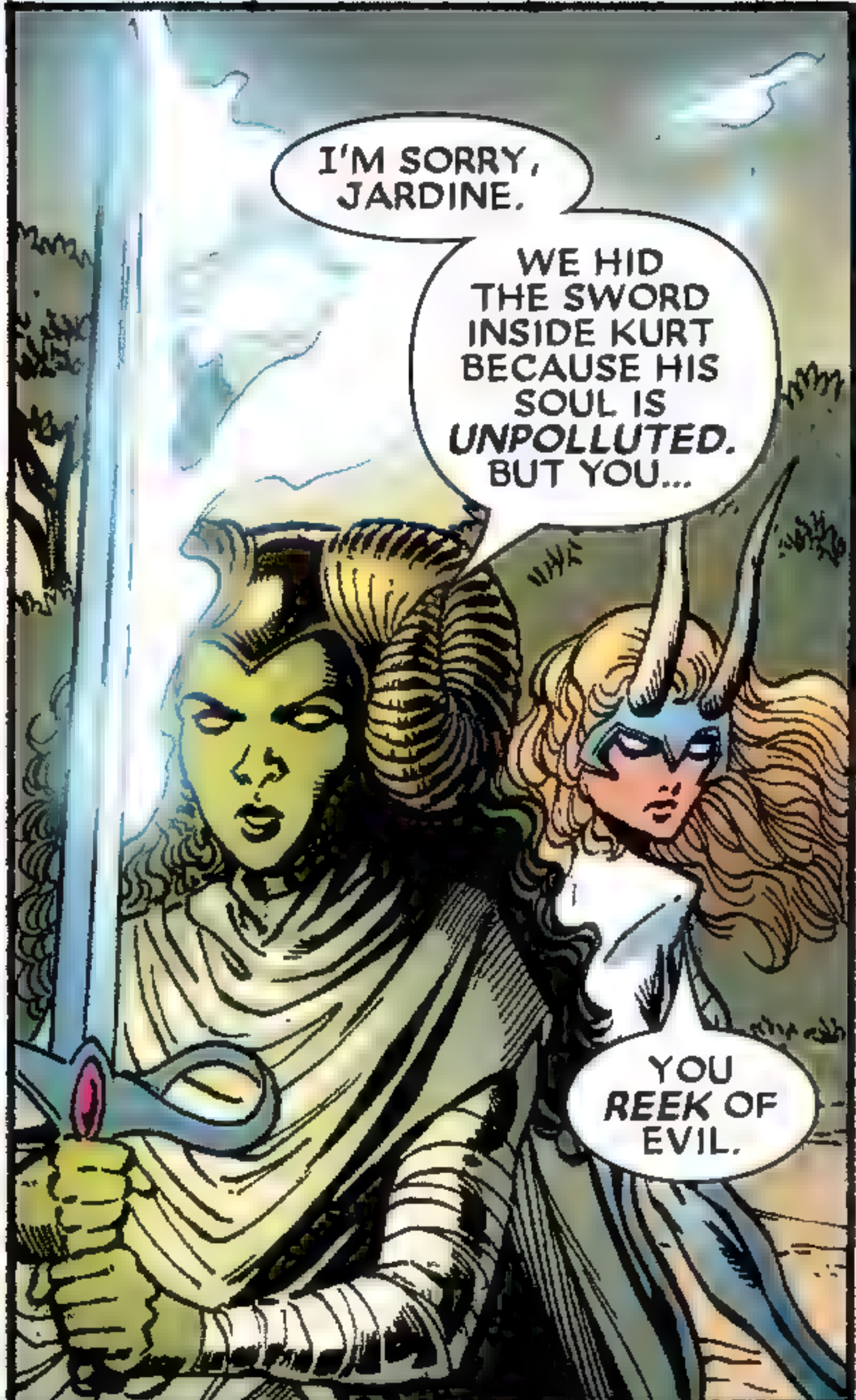
...IT FEELS AS IF AN AMAZING WEIGHT--
A BURDEN I HADN'T EVEN BEEN AWARE
OF--HAS SLIPPED FROM MY
SHOULDERS.



CAN I...

~~COUGH~~,
~~COUGH~~

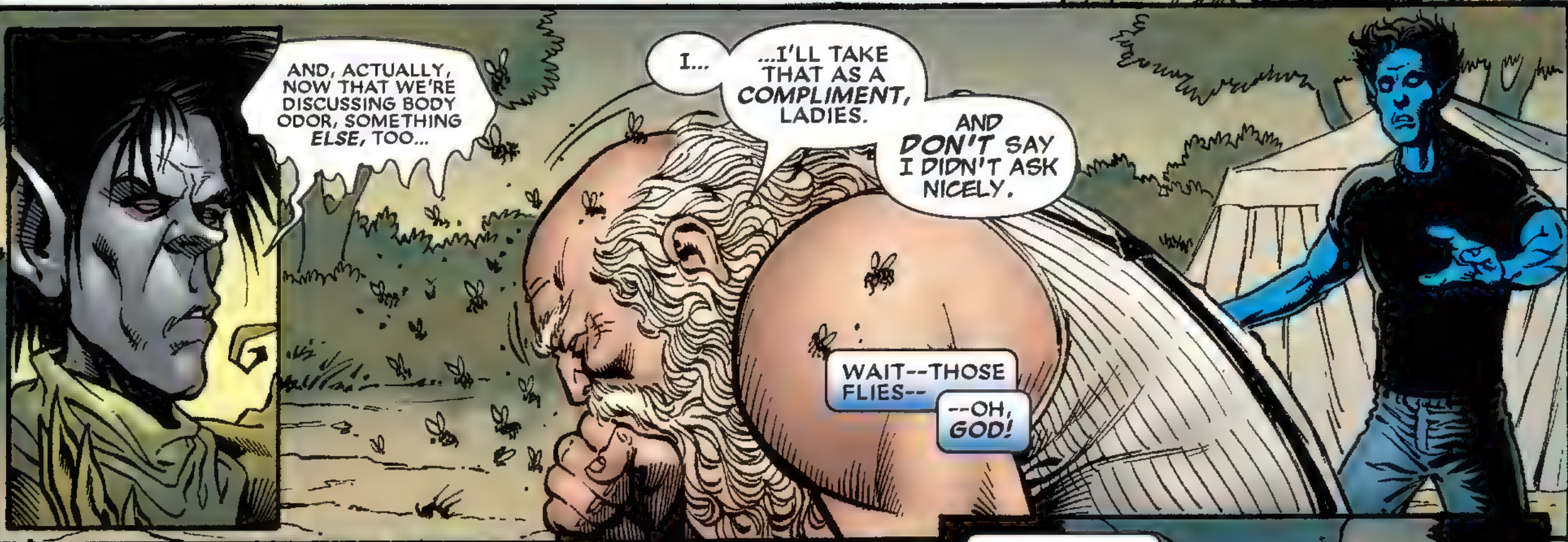
...WOULD IT
BE ALL RIGHT IF
I HELD IT? JUST
TO SAY I
HAD?



I'M SORRY,
JARDINE.

WE HID
THE SWORD
INSIDE KURT
BECAUSE HIS
SOUL IS
UNPOLLUTED.
BUT YOU...

YOU
REEK OF
EVIL.



AND, ACTUALLY,
NOW THAT WE'RE
DISCUSSING BODY
ODOR, SOMETHING
ELSE, TOO...

I...

...I'LL TAKE
THAT AS A
COMPLIMENT,
LADIES.

AND
DON'T SAY
I DIDN'T ASK
NICELY.

WAIT--THOSE
FLIES--

--OH,
GOD!



GET
AWAY
FROM HIM!
MOVE
BACK!

FLIES ARE
THE DEMONS'
FAMILIARS.

WHAAARRGGHHH!

JARDINE LOOKS AS SICK AS
HE DOES, I REALIZE IN THAT
MOMENT, BECAUSE HE'S
ALSO HAD SOMETHING
INSIDE HIM.



SOMETHING THAT'S
FINALLY REVEALING
ITSELF.



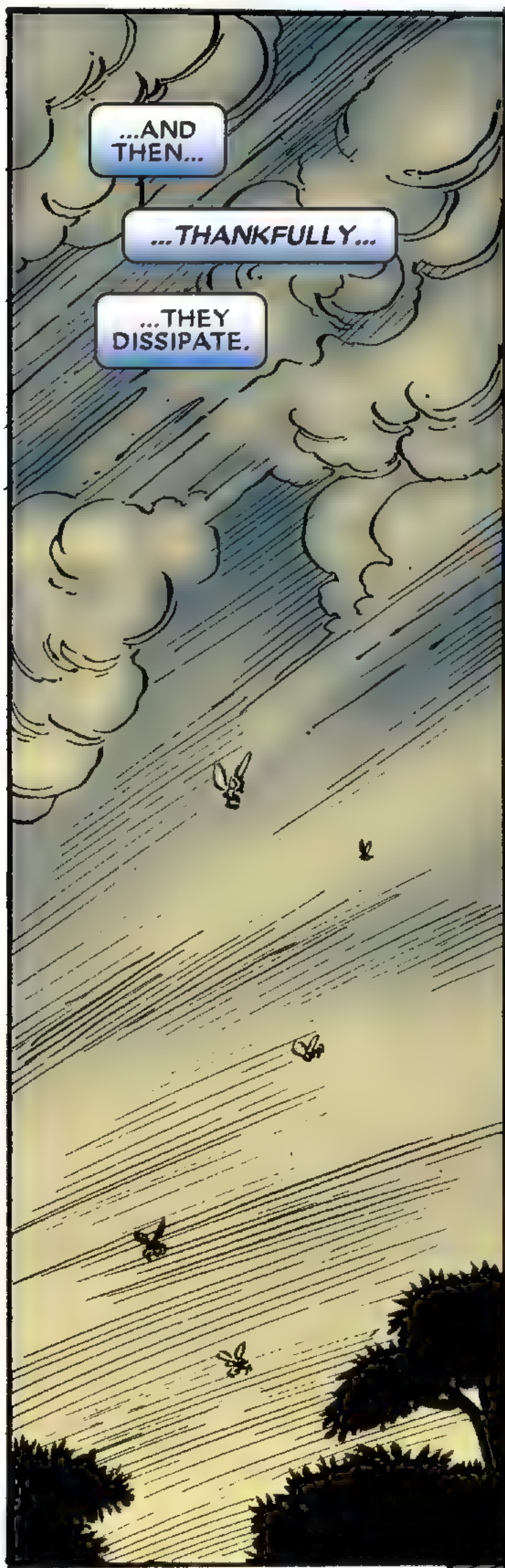
WHILE IT--LORD--
WHILE IT LOOKS FOR
ANOTHER HOST!

EVERYONE--

CLOSE
YOUR EYES--
COVER YOUR
EARS!



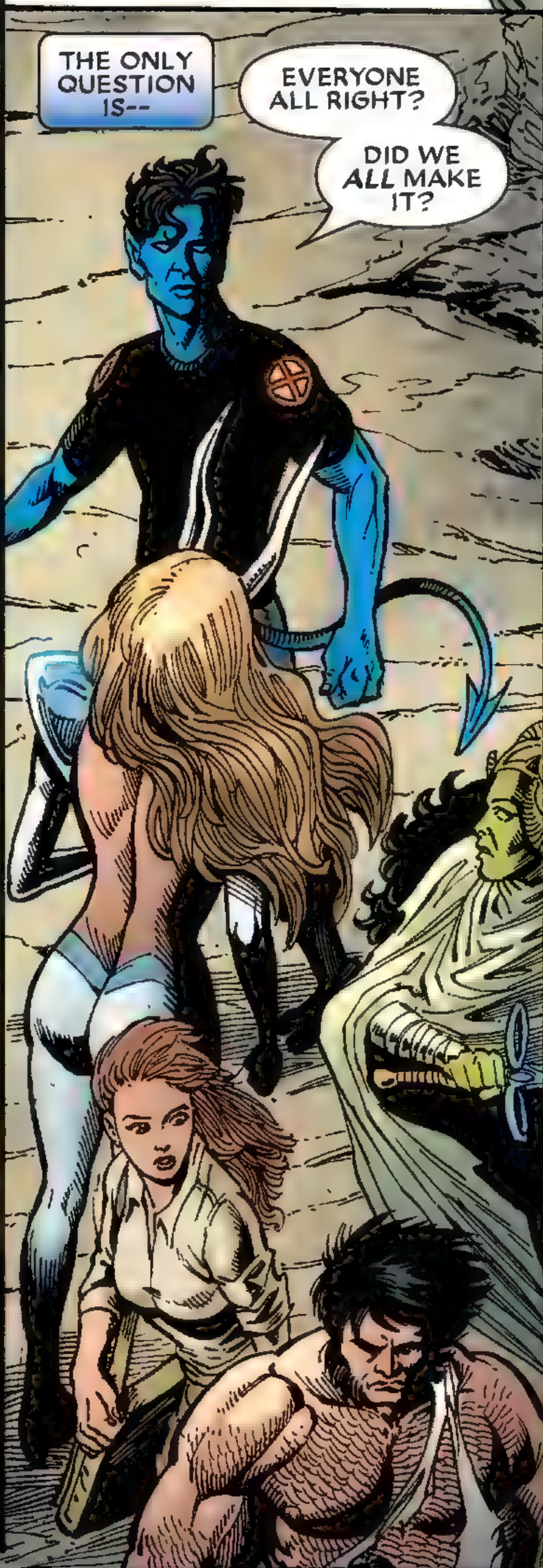
THEY DO--THE
FLIES SWARM
AROUND US...



...AND
THEN...

...THANKFULLY...

...THEY
DISSIPATE.



THE ONLY
QUESTION
IS--

EVERYONE
ALL RIGHT?

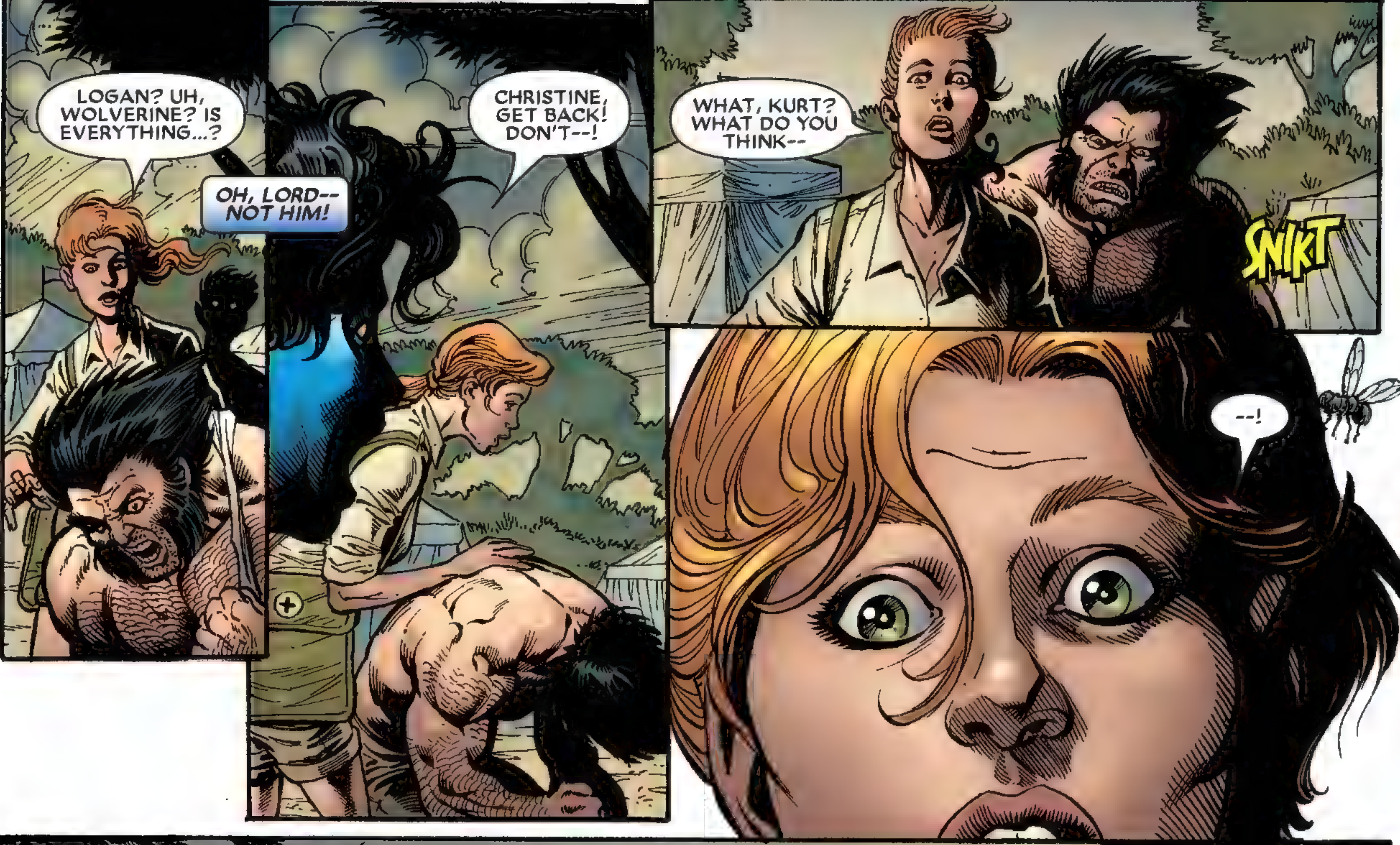
DID WE
ALL MAKE
IT?



AT THE
RISK OF BEING
A KILLJOY...

...THAT
EVIL'S STILL
HERE.

OH, NO, BUT...
WHERE? IN
WHOM?





HM?
"LOGAN"?

OH,
YESSSS.
LOGAN'S IN
HERE WITH
THE REST
OF US.

WE'RE
HIVE.

AND WE'LL
KILL AS MANY
OF YOU AS
NEED BE TO
GET THAT
SWORD.

⊗ TO BE CONTINUED...

MARVEL

11

AGUIRRE-SACASA

ROBERTSON

RAMOS

NIGHTCRAWLER

TM



DARCO
05

He's your best friend and the monster that lives under your bed! And he must go where the other X-Men won't—into the shadows that have always called to him!

PREVIOUSLY

NIGHTCRAWLER



To rediscover his past and decipher some strange dreams, KURT WAGNER, a.k.a. the X-MAN, NIGHTCRAWLER, has traveled to the location of a Florida circus he was part of as a youth. Joining him on this journey is his friend CHRISTINE PALMER and fellow X-Man, WOLVERINE. Once there, Kurt finds the circus owner Jardine, who tries to warn Kurt of something evil coming. But it is too late—a whole slew of monsters soon swarms the circus, wreaking intense havoc.

Meanwhile in LIMBO, Kurt's foster sister and ruler of the demonic realm, AMANDA SEFTON, has been ambushed and tortured by the hideous demon known as NIGHTMARE, who was demanding the location of the SOULSWORD. However, when Amanda's mother MARGALI SZARDOS shows up to free her daughter, Nightmare has no recollection of even wanting the SOULSWORD. They leave Limbo and rendezvous with Kurt in Florida. Upon their arrival, they reveal that the Soulsword is closer than anyone suspects. Using a bit of magic, Margali pulls the sword out of Nightcrawler!

Once she does this, however, Jardine starts spewing hundreds of flies out of his mouth. The flies are in fact the demon HIVE, and they've found a new host, Wolverine! And his first act as a newly possessed demon? Stabbing Christine Palmer!



I'VE SEEN THAT
EXPRESSION
BEFORE.

THE ONE
ON MY FRIEND
LOGAN'S
FACE.



ENRAGED.
INSANE. FULL OF
BLOODLUST.



FULL OF
EVIL.

THE WINDING WAY CONCLUSION

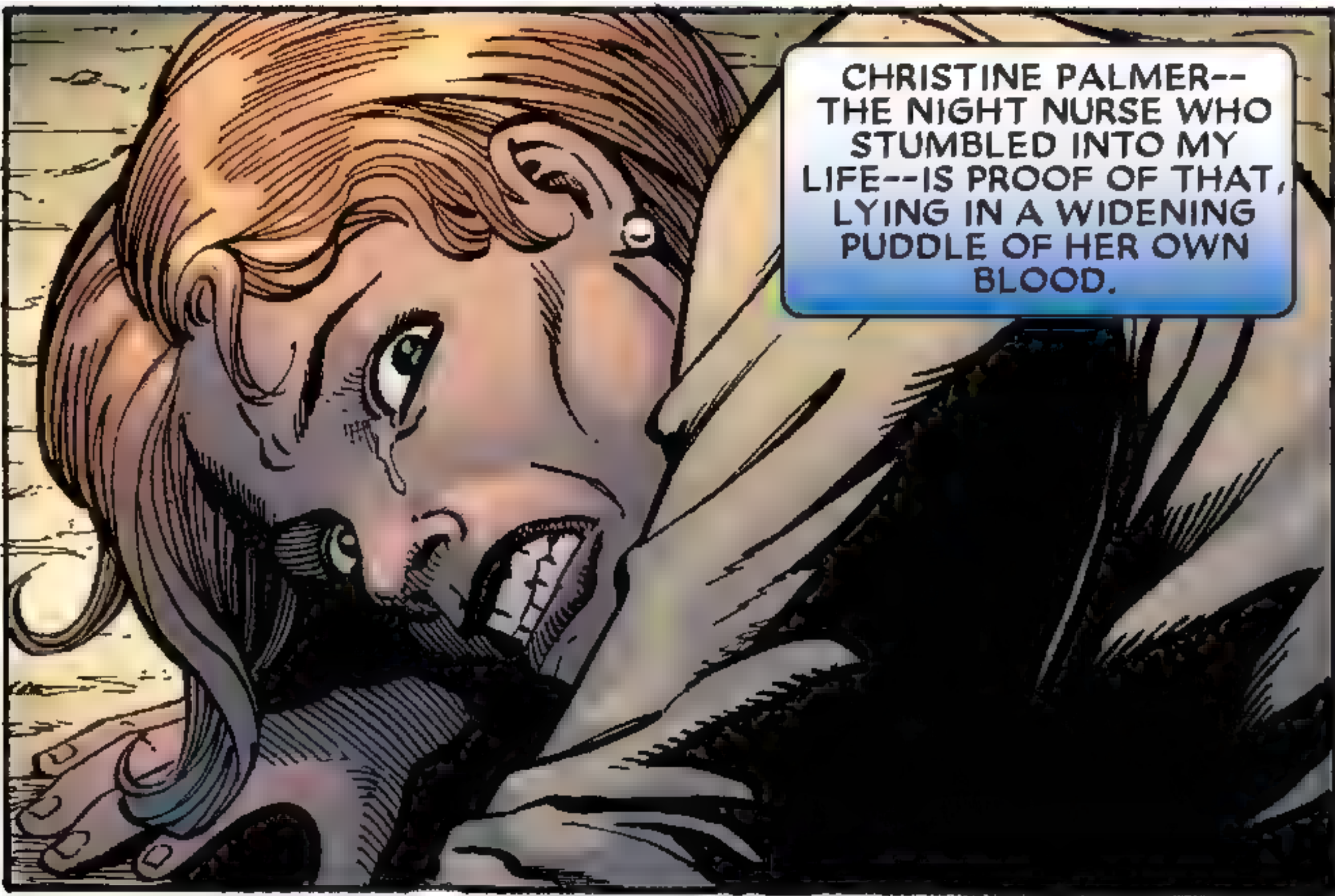
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WITH ITS HEALING
FACTOR, LOGAN'S
BODY IS VERY NEARLY
INDESTRUCTIBLE.

EVEN WHEN **NOT** POSSESSED BY
A DEMON NAMED **HIVE**, HE'S
A KILLING MACHINE THROUGH
AND THROUGH.



CHRISTINE PALMER--
THE NIGHT NURSE WHO
STUMBLED INTO MY
LIFE--IS PROOF OF THAT,
LYING IN A WIDENING
PUDDLE OF HER OWN
BLOOD.

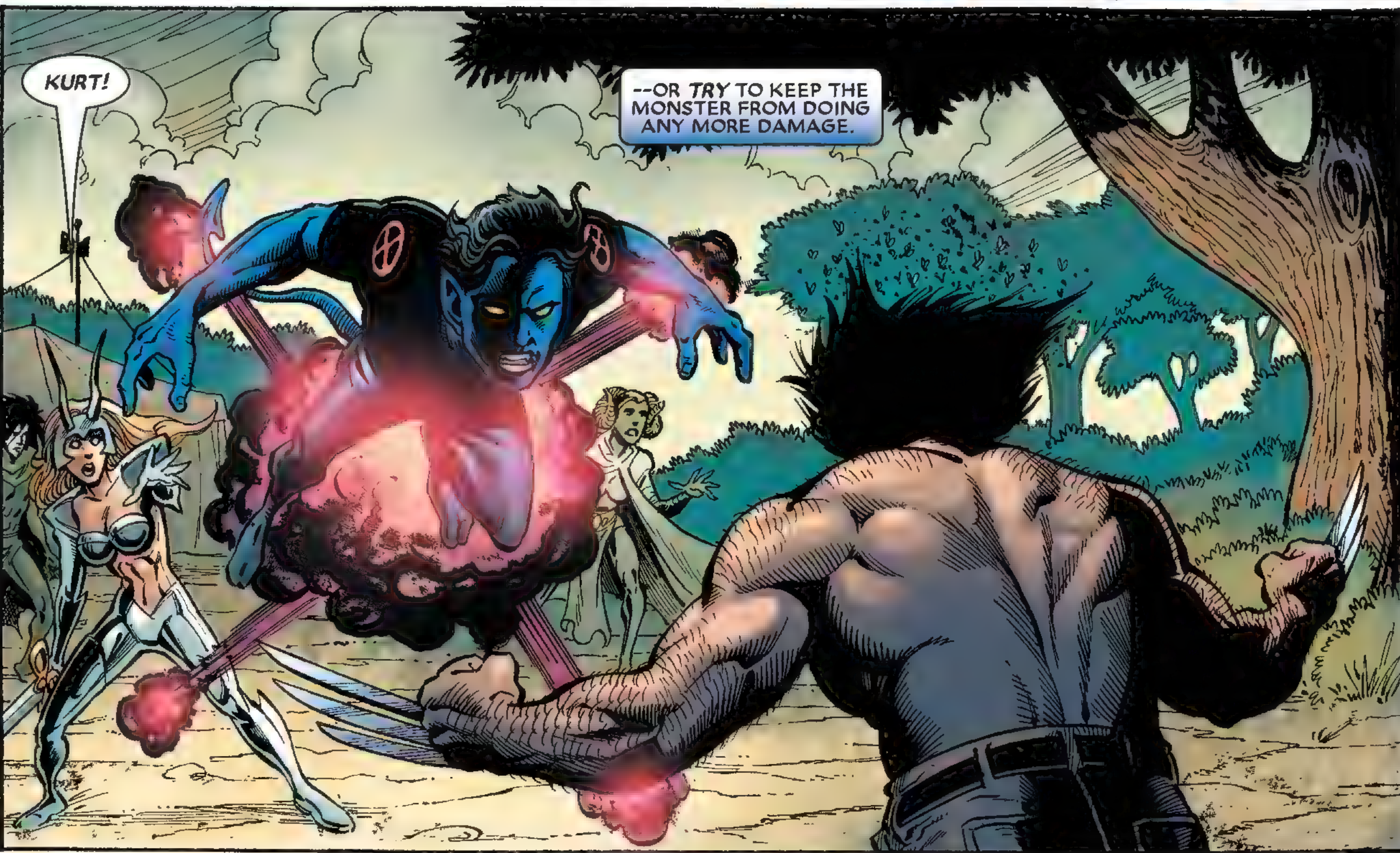


THIS IS ONE OF THOSE TOUGH
CHOICES WE X-MEN HAVE TO
MAKE PERIODICALLY. STAY TO
HELP THE INNOCENT AND THE
WOUNDED--



KURT!

--OR **TRY** TO KEEP THE
MONSTER FROM DOING
ANY MORE DAMAGE.





STEP TWO:

BAMF!

GET AWAY FROM
LOGAN BEFORE HE
HURTS ME.

...
A GAME?
HIDE-AND-
SEEK? WE
LOVE
GAMES...

"...WHERE ARE
YOU HIDING,
MUTANT?"

IT'S LIKE PLAYING MARCO-
POLO IN THE X-POOL, ONLY
THE STAKES ARE MUCH,
MUCH HIGHER.

THIS IS LUNACY,
MUTANT. WE CAN
SMELL YOUR SWEAT.
WE CAN HEAR YOUR
PULSE. WE CAN
FEEL YOUR FEAR.

THE ONLY
REASON YOU'RE
STILL ALIVE
IS...

"...ACTUALLY,
WE CAN'T THINK
OF A SINGLE
REASON WHY
YOU SHOULD BE
ALIVE."

KEEP TALKING,
DEMON.

AND MAYBE I'LL
FIGURE OUT WHY
THIS ALL FEELS--
WHY YOU FEEL--
SO FAMILIAR.

WE DON'T MIND
THIS, YOU KNOW.
THIS...STAY OF
EXECUTION.

WHAT'S A FEW MORE
MOMENTS? WE'VE HAD
THIS DATE SINCE...

"...WELL, SINCE
YOUR BROTHER,
AT LEAST."

MY...?

STEPHEN...?

AND THE PENNY
FINALLY DROPS.
AND THE YEARS
COLLAPSE LIKE
A HOUSE OF
CARDS.

THE PAST *FLOODS*
OVER ME. MEMORIES
UPON MEMORIES...

IT'S A FEW DAYS
AFTER MY ESCAPE
FROM JARDINE'S
CARNIVAL. I'M STILL
IN FLORIDA, CALLING
HOME--WINZELDORF--
TO TELL MY BELOVED
WHAT'S HAPPENED.

JIMAINÉ?

JIMAINÉ,
ARE YOU
THERE?

KURT,
THANK
GOD!

WHERE
ARE YOU?

JIMAINÉ,
WHY--WHY ARE YOU
WHISPERING?

IT'S OUR
BROTHER, KURT,
IT'S STEPHEN!
HE'S--HE'S--

--OH, KURT, SOMETHING
AWFUL'S HAPPENING TO HIM.
HOWEVER TROUBLED STEPHEN
WAS BEFORE, IT'S MUCH,
MUCH WORSE NOW.

WORSE
HOW?

HE SAYS--HE SAYS
DEMONS ARE AFTER
HIM! HE SAYS THEY'RE
STALKING HIM--TELLING
HIM TO DO TERRIBLE,
TERRIBLE THINGS...

MEIN
GOTT...

I CAN'T TALK
FOR LONG, STEPHEN
MIGHT HEAR ME, BUT
PLEASE--PLEASE--
COME HOME,
MY LOVE.

I'VE
BEEN HAVING
NIGHTMARES--
THE MOST
UNSPEAKABLE
VISIONS...

JIMAINÉ, LISTEN
TO ME--STAY AS FAR
AWAY FROM STEPHEN
AS YOU CAN, DO YOU
UNDERSTAND?
AND--

--AND I'LL
BE THERE SOON,
ALL RIGHT?



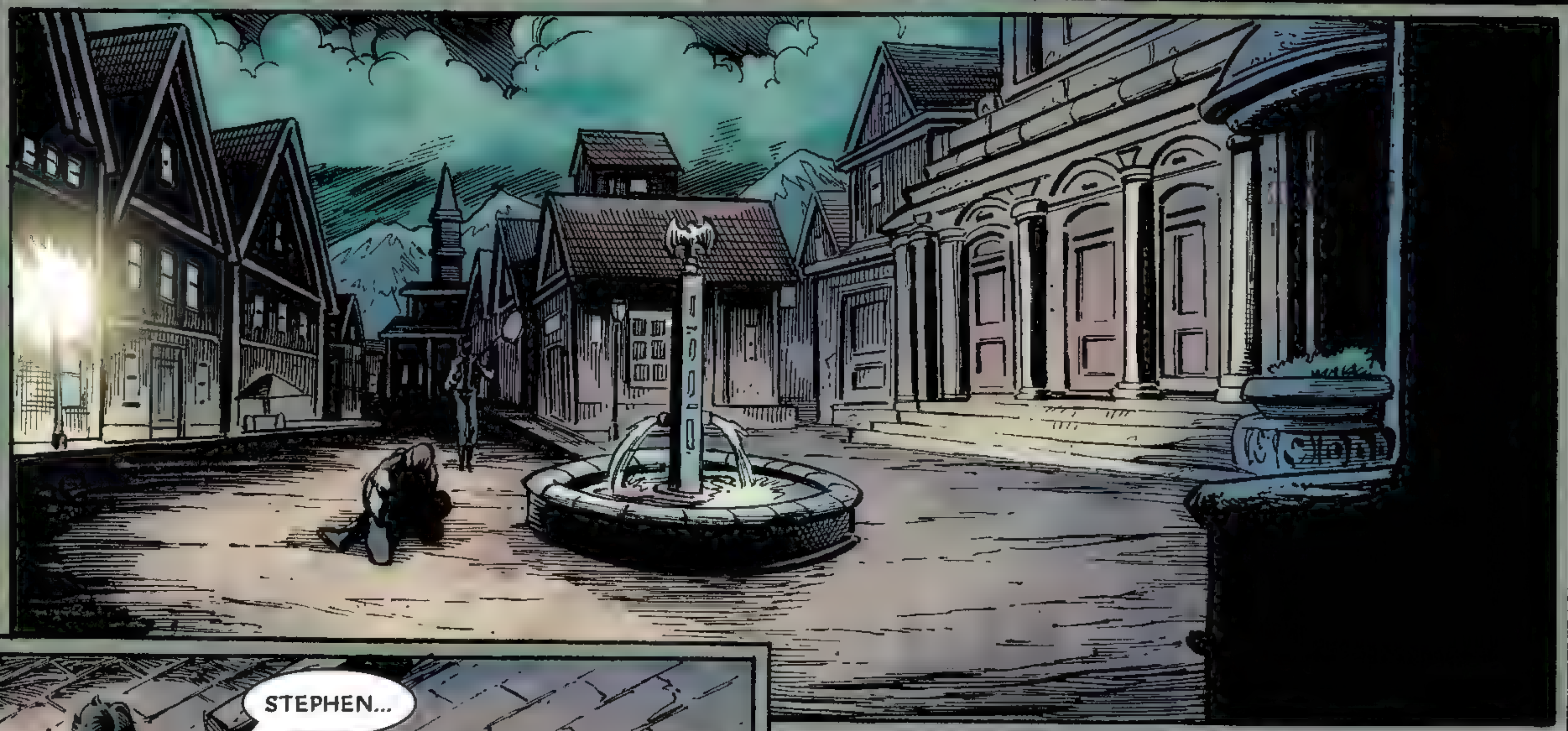
"AS SOON AS I
CAN GET MYSELF
TO GERMANY."

WHICH I *DID*, BY
TELEPORTING ONTO A
DEPARTING AIRPLANE,
THEN TELEPORTING
OFF IT.

ARRIVING IN
WINZELDORF
EXHAUSTED...



...AND--GOD
HELP ME--FAR
TOO LATE.



STEPHEN...



BROTHER...

THE AMAZING
NIGHTCRAWLER...

HOME, HOME,
HOME...



STEPHEN,
ARE YOU...ARE
YOU ALL RIGHT?
JIMAINÉ CALLED
ME AND...

AND...



STEPHEN,
WHAT
HAVE YOU
DONE?

THERE WERE BODIES
OF YOUNG CHILDREN--
A DOZEN, PERHAPS
MORE--FLOATING IN
THE FOUNTAIN'S BLOOD-
STAINED WATER.



GOTT
IN HEIMEL,
WHY...?

I HAD TO,
BROTHER.



BUT
THESE
ARE...

...THESE
WERE
CHILDREN.

NO-NO-
THEY ONLY
LOOK THAT
WAY!

I KNOW
THE TRUTH
ABOUT
THEM...



...
WHAT TRUTH,
BROTHER?



THE...THE
VOICES INSIDE
ME, INSIDE MY
HEAD...

THEY
TOLD
ME...

I THOUGHT MY
BROTHER WAS
DERANGED. I
DIDN'T KNOW--

--THAT THERE WAS SOMETHING
INSIDE HIM. WHISPERING INTO HIS
SOUL. TELLING HIM THAT...

...THESE CHILDREN
WEREN'T REALLY
CHILDREN, KURT.
UNDERNEATH, THEY
WERE... DEMONS.

MONSTERS
I HAD TO KILL
BEFORE THEY
ROSE UP AND
KILLED US.

I REMEMBER THINKING:
"IF I TALK TO HIM SLOWLY
AND CALMLY, THIS CAN END
WITHOUT ANY FURTHER
BLOODSHED."

...I
UNDERSTAND,
BROTHER. NOW
PLEASE...

...LET ME
HOLD THAT
KNIFE FOR YOU,
ALL RIGHT?

Y-YES,
IT'S... DONE
NOW. IT'S
OVER. I
CAN...

...I THINK
I CAN GIVE
IT TO YOU.

IN THE YEARS SINCE
THAT NIGHT, I'VE
ASKED MYSELF OVER
AND OVER "WHY DID
IT HAVE TO HAPPEN?"

"WHY DID THAT CHILD--
WHOM STEPHEN THOUGHT
WAS DEAD, WHOM FATE HAD
SPARED-- WHY DID HE CHOOSE
THAT MOMENT TO SHUDDER
BACK TO LIFE?"

COUGH,
COUGH

UHN...
UHNH...

"WHY COULDN'T
HE HAVE STAYED
STILL FIVE SECONDS
LONGER?"

WHAT...?

ALIVE
STILL?

NO--
STEPHEN--
WAIT--!

I WAS YOUNG AND INEXPERIENCED, BUT I COULD'VE DONE ANY NUMBER OF THINGS.

THE DEVIL--
THE PRINCE OF LIES--PLAYING DEAD...



TELEPORTED TO THE CHILD--THEN TELEPORTED HIM TO SAFETY.

YOU'LL DIE AS SURELY AS THE REST...



TELEPORTED TO STEPHEN-- THEN TELEPORTED HIM TO WHERE HE COULDN'T HAVE DONE ANY MORE HARM.

BROTHER!



THERE WASN'T TIME TO THINK. MY BROTHER'S KNIFE FLASHED IN THE MOONLIGHT AS I REACHED FOR HIM--

YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND-- YOU'LL NEVER UNDERSTAND--

--AS I WRAPPED MY ARMS AROUND HIS NECK TO PULL HIM BACK--



--AND--

CRACKKKK!

--THE GRUESOME SOUND OF BONES BREAKING. ECHOING ACROSS THE YEARS FOR THE REST OF MY LIFE...



THE CHILD WAS SAFE,
WARM AND ALIVE IN MY
ARMS, BUT STEPHEN...

...HIS BODY WAS
ALREADY GOING
COLD AT MY FEET.

I REMEMBERED
A VOW I'D MADE
TO HIM MONTHS
BEFORE...

PROMISE ME, BROTHER,
IF I EVER *CHANGE*...IF I
START *HURTING*
PEOPLE...

PROMISE YOU'LL
STOP ME--NO MATTER
WHAT IT TAKES.

I...

...ALL RIGHT,
STEPHEN...I
PROMISE.

HAD HE KNOWN?
THAT EVENTUALLY,
SOMETHING DEMONIC
WOULD TAKE CONTROL
OF HIM AND FORCE
HIM TO...?

...FORCE
ME TO...?



WAS HIVE THERE,
ALL THOSE YEARS
AGO?

...
YOU'RE NOT
SAYING ANYTHING,
NIGHTCRAWLER, BUT
WE CAN HEAR THE
WHEELS TURNING
INSIDE YOU ...



SO MANY
QUESTIONS YOU
MUST HAVE ...

WHY DID WE
WHISPER SWEET
NOTHINGS INTO POOR
STEPHEN SZARDOS'S
EAR? WHY DIDN'T WE
POSSESS HIM THE WAY
WE POSSESSED
THIS BODY?



OR DID
WE?

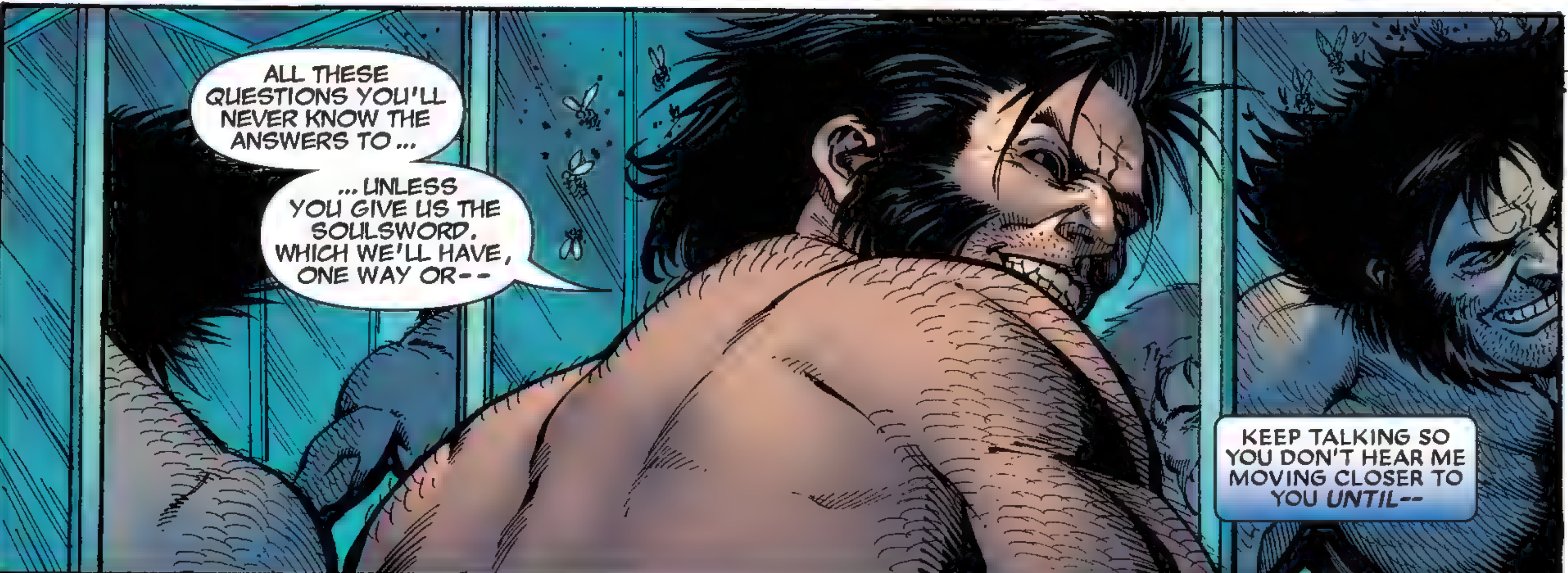
DID WE-- AT THAT
LAST MOMENT-- TAKE
HOLD OF STEPHEN'S
BODY AND TWIST HIS
LITTLE NECK AROUND
UNTIL IT BROKE,
BROKE, BROKE?



HAVE YOU
BEEN BLAMING
YOURSELF FOR
NOTHING ALL
THESE YEARS?
IMAGINE...

FOREVER
TRYING TO WIPE
YOUR BROTHER'S
BLOOD FROM
YOUR FILTHY
HANDS?

KEEP TALKING,
DEMON.

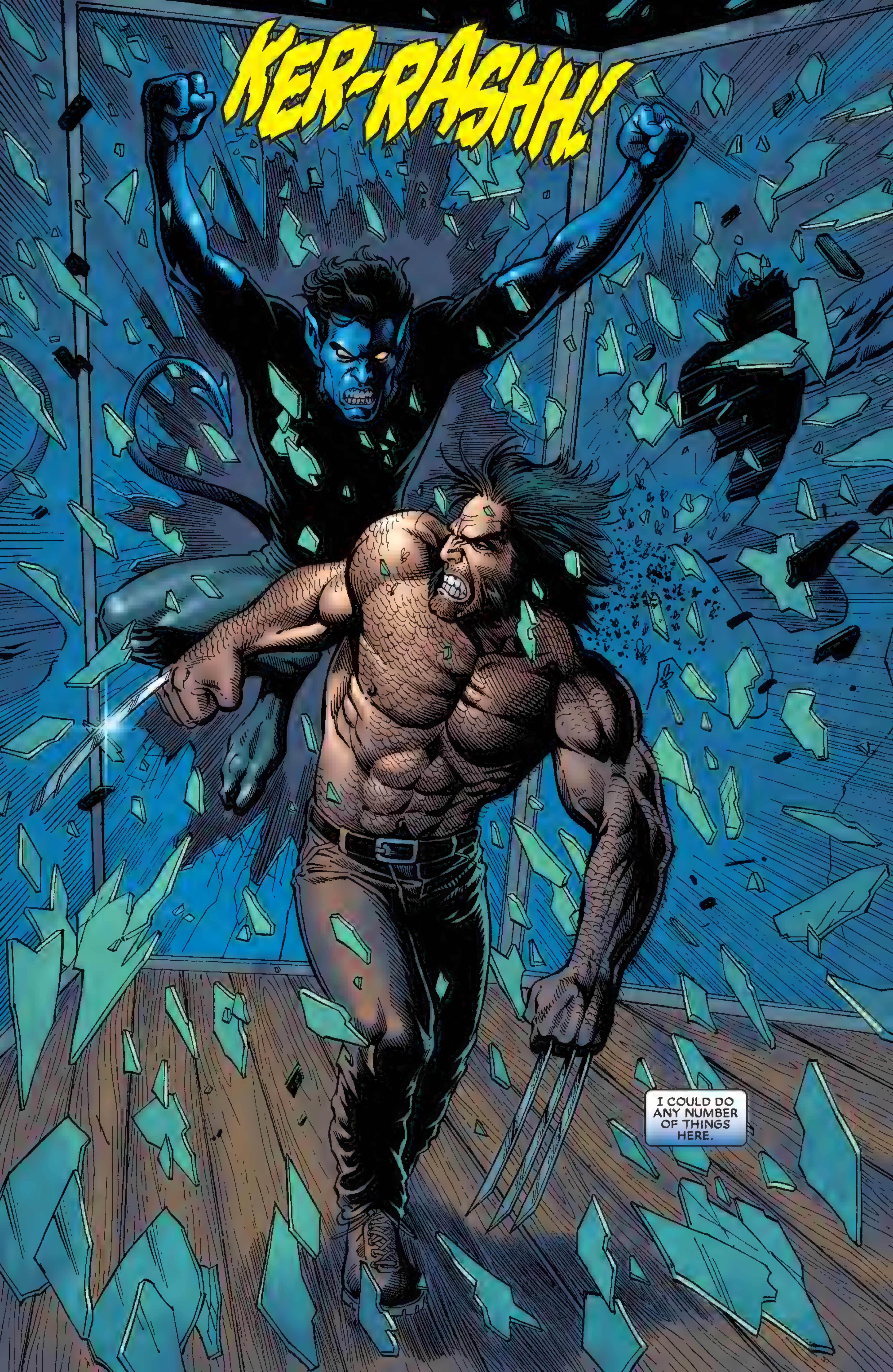


ALL THESE
QUESTIONS YOU'LL
NEVER KNOW THE
ANSWERS TO ...

... UNLESS
YOU GIVE US THE
SOULSWORD,
WHICH WE'LL HAVE,
ONE WAY OR--

KEEP TALKING SO
YOU DON'T HEAR ME
MOVING CLOSER TO
YOU UNTIL--

KER-RASHH!



I COULD DO
ANY NUMBER
OF THINGS
HERE.

IF I WERE FIGHTING
LOGAN--A NON-
POSSESSED LOGAN--
I WOULDN'T BE ABLE
TO DO THIS.

"HIVE," DID
YOU SAY YOUR
NAME WAS?

ANY OF
THIS.

BUT SINCE HIVE
DOESN'T KNOW HOW
TO USE LOGAN'S BODY
THE WAY LOGAN
KNOWS HOW TO USE
HIS BODY--

WHEREVER
YOU TAKE US,
WE'LL KEEP
COMING
UNTIL--

BAMF!

CRACKKK!

THAT'S FOR
STEPHEN--
WHETHER YOU
KILLED HIM
THAT NIGHT
OR NOT.



BAMF!

KURT--

WHERE'S THAT *HIDEOUS* HIVE? SURELY NOT DEAD?



NO, NIGHTMARE, HE IS--*THEY ARE*-- TRAPPED IN LOGAN'S BODY WHILE IT HEALS--

--WHICH WON'T TAKE LONG.

WHERE'S CHRISTINE?

NOT TO WORRY, HANDSOME...



...SHE'S IN GOOD HANDS.



AMANDA?

WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO HER?

SAVING HER LIFE, LOVERBOY. YOU WATCH ENOUGH EPISODES OF *E.R.*, YOU CAN ADAPT YOUR MAGIC TO DO JUST ABOUT ANYTHING.

LIKE SLOW DOWN CHRISTINE'S BEATING HEART WHILE I MAKE HER WOUNDS CLOSE. REGENERATE THE TORN TISSUE, REPLACE THE LOST BLOOD.

I COULD KISS AMANDA. MAYBE AFTER ALL THIS IS OVER, I WILL. IN THE MEANTIME--



WHAT ABOUT LOGAN? WHERE'S HE--*HIS SOUL*-- THROUGHOUT ALL THIS?

TSKK.

WHAT DO YOU THINK I'M DOING HERE, NIGHTCRAWLER? PREPPING THE FLOOR SHOW?

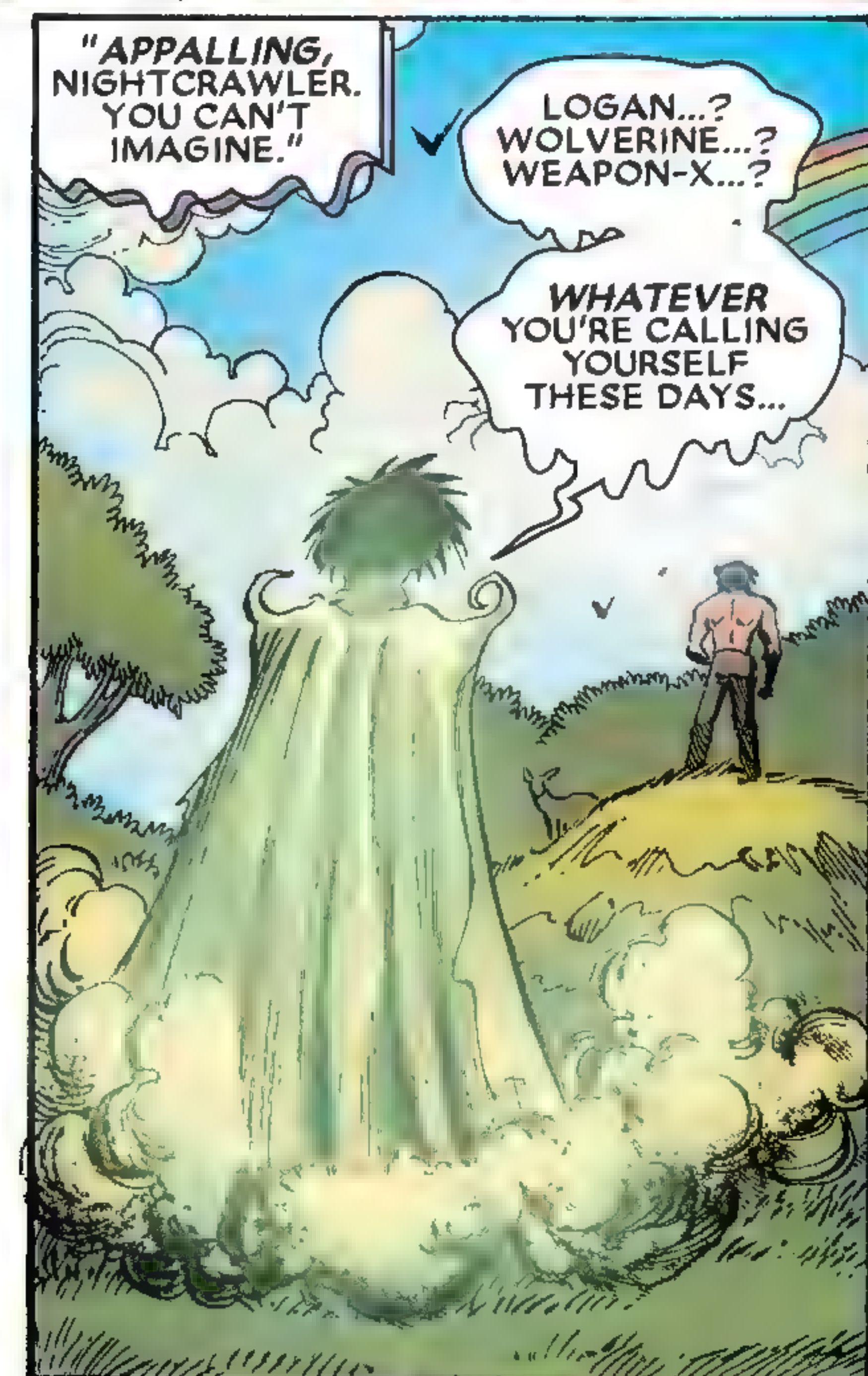


AS IT HAPPENS, I'M
ASTRAL-PROJECTING
AT THE MOMENT.
SEARCHING THE NETHER-
REALMS FOR WHEREVER
HIVE'S DISPLACED YOUR
POOR FRIEND'S--

HANG
ON A TIC,
I THINK I
FOUND--

OH,
DEAR.

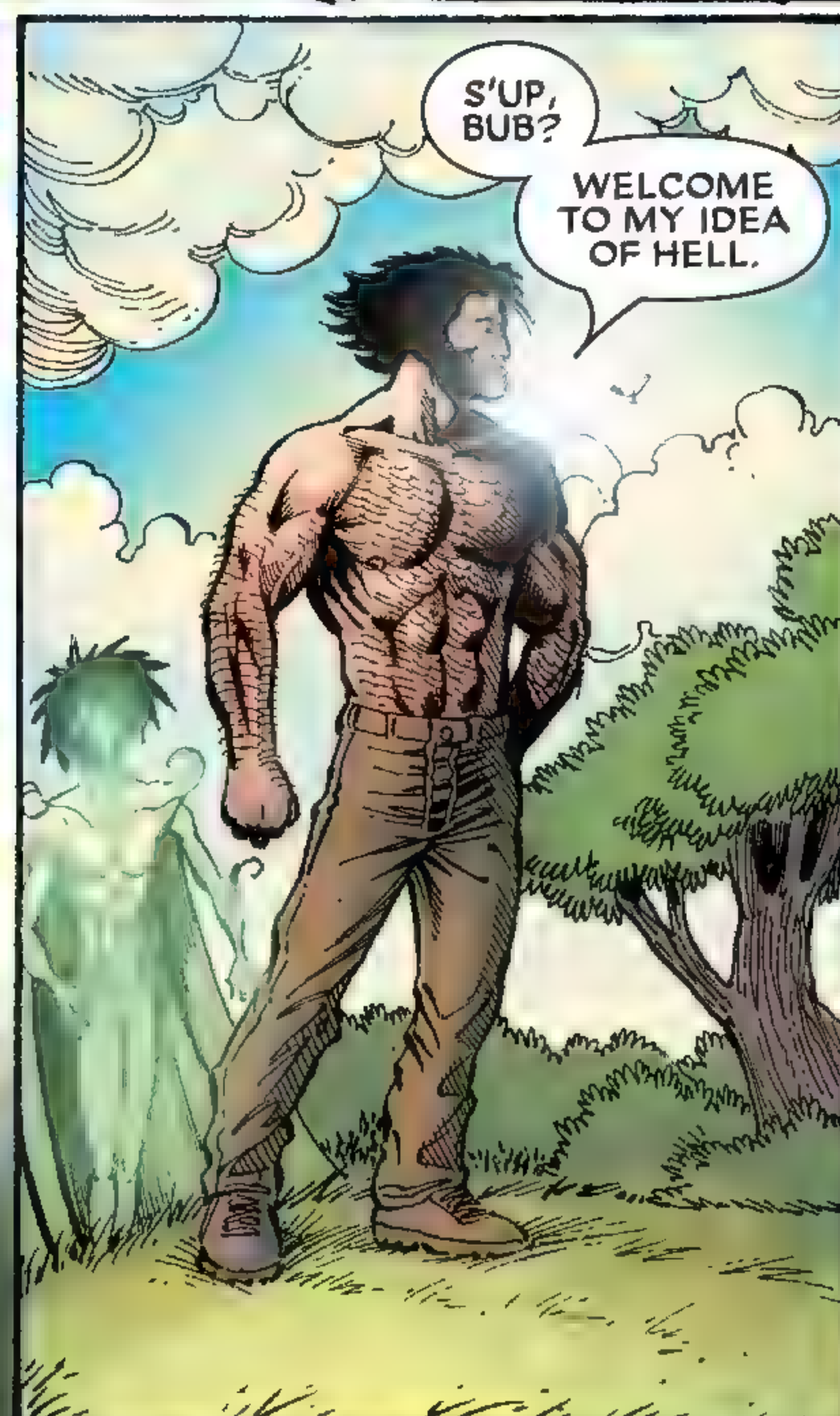
WHAT? IS HE
SOMEWHERE
AWFUL?



"APPALLING,
NIGHTCRAWLER.
YOU CAN'T
IMAGINE."

LOGAN...?
WOLVERINE...?
WEAPON-X...?

WHATEVER
YOU'RE CALLING
YOURSELF
THESE DAYS...



S'UP,
BUB?

WELCOME
TO MY IDEA
OF HELL.



YES, WELL, DON'T DESPAIR.
YOU'RE NOT IN CHARGE OF
YOUR BODY RIGHT NOW, BUT
SOMETHING'S GOING TO
HAPPEN--SOON, HOPEFULLY--
AND YOU'RE GOING TO NEED
TO BE READY TO JUMP
BACK IN.



OH,
DON'T
WORRY
ABOUT
ME.

I CAN
DO THAT
EASY.



NIGHTMARE?
IS LOGAN--?

HE'S *SURLY*,
BUT HE'LL
SURVIVE.

ASSUMING, OF
COURSE, THAT
HIVE CAN BE
DISPATCHED.



HE CAN
BE.

HOW?

TELL ME,
MARGALI.

WITH THAT
WHICH HE *SEEKS*,
KURT. WITH THE
SOULSWORD.



PLEASE,
MOTHER,
LOGAN'S
BODY IS
HEALING--

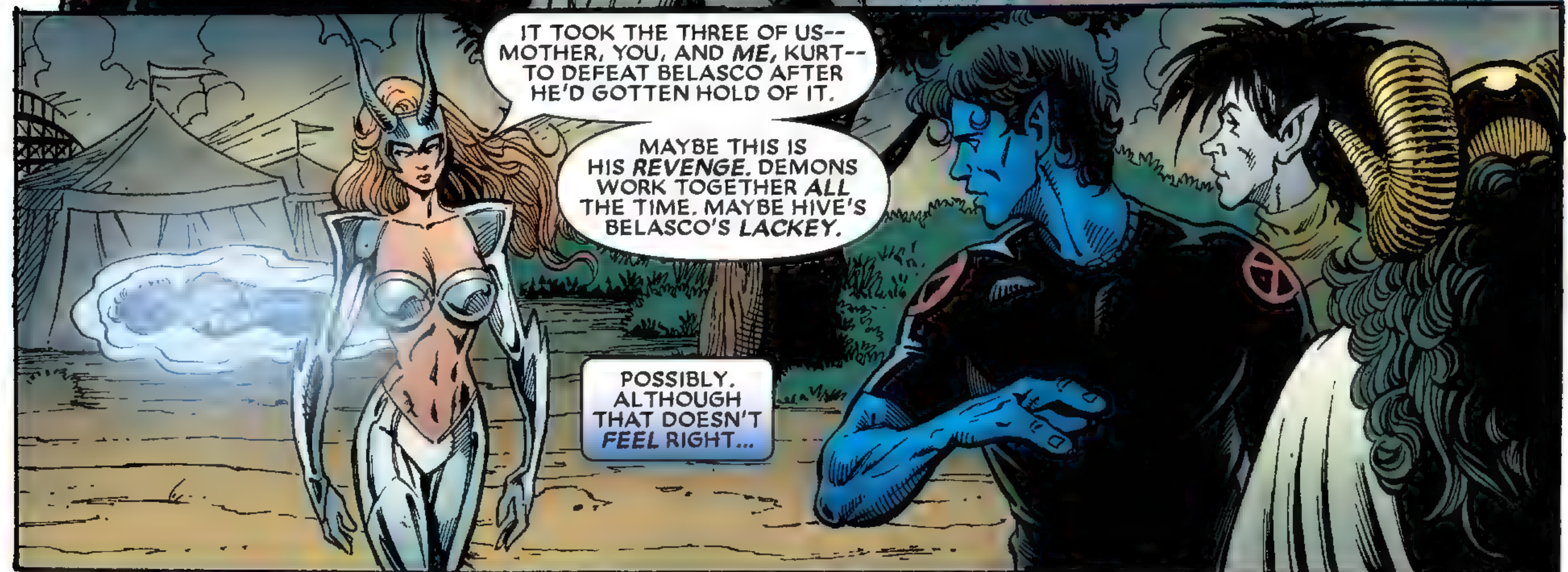
THERE ARE
TWO KINDS OF
BEINGS WHO COVET
THE SWORD, STEP-
SON. *MAGICALS*, LIKE
ME. AND *DEMONS*,
LIKE HIVE--AND, BEFORE
HIM, *BELASCO*, WHO
HAS COME AFTER THE
SOULSWORD...MANY,
MANY TIMES.



THE SORCERER NAMED
GRAVEMOSS POSSESSED
YOU IN HIS EFFORTS TO
WREST THE SWORD
FROM KITTY PRYDE--

I
REMEMBER.

--BECAUSE HE WANTED
TO USE IT TO KILL ANYONE
WHO STOOD BEFORE HIM
ALONG *THE WINDING WAY*--
THE *PATH MAGICALS*
FOLLOW TO BECOME MORE
POWERFUL.



IT TOOK THE THREE OF US--
MOTHER, YOU, AND *ME*, KURT--
TO DEFEAT *BELASCO* AFTER
HE'D GOTTEN HOLD OF IT.

MAYBE THIS IS
HIS *REVENGE*. *DEMONS*
WORK TOGETHER *ALL*
THE TIME. MAYBE HIVE'S
BELASCO'S LACKEY.

POSSIBLY.
ALTHOUGH
THAT DOESN'T
FEEL RIGHT...



TAKE THE
SOULSWORD,
STEPSON.

IT
WILL KILL
HIVE.

KILL HIM?
BUT...WHAT
ABOUT
LOGAN?

"HIS BODY WILL REMAIN
INTACT, SON. THE
SOULSWORD CAN ONLY
HURT AND DESTROY
SUPERNATURAL BEINGS."



HIVE! ARE
YOU--?

BAMF!



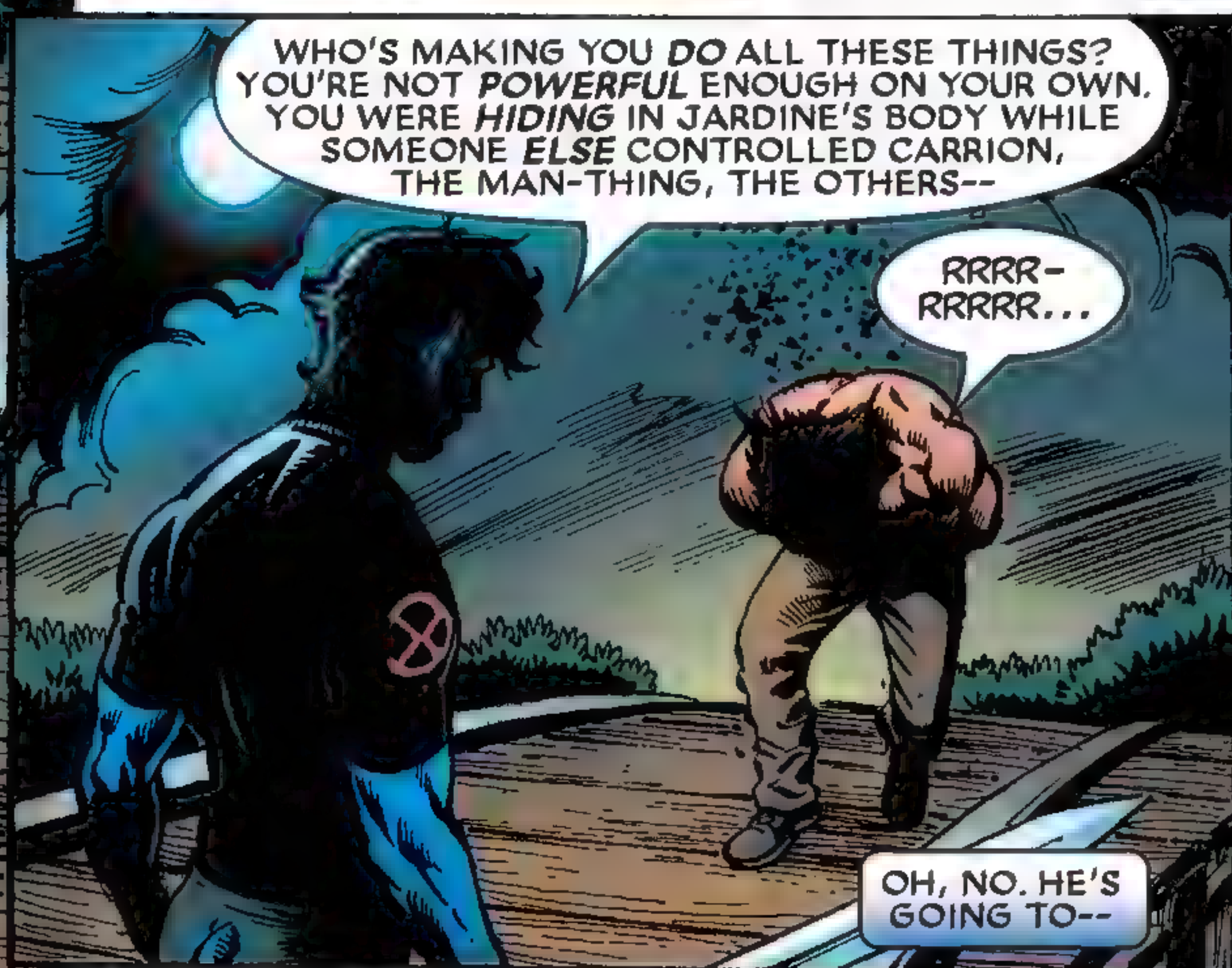
WE'RE HERE,
MUTANT. EAGER
FOR OUR...
BOOTY.



IT DOESN'T
HAVE TO END
THIS WAY. YOU
DON'T HAVE
TO DIE BY THIS
SWORD'S
BLADE.

IS THAT
WHAT'S GOING
TO HAPPEN?

BY THE NINE
RINGS, YOU TRULY
BELIEVE SUCH A
THING, DON'T YOU?



WHO'S MAKING YOU DO ALL THESE THINGS?
YOU'RE NOT **POWERFUL** ENOUGH ON YOUR OWN.
YOU WERE **HIDING** IN JARDINE'S BODY WHILE
SOMEONE **ELSE** CONTROLLED CARRION,
THE MAN-THING, THE OTHERS--

RRRR-
RRRR...

OH, NO. HE'S
GOING TO--



...RROOOAARRR!



POOR, DELIDED NIGHTCRAWLER.

WITH NO BODY TO STRIKE, WHAT CAN YOU CLIT?

POOR, POOR PAWN ...

...WHAT CAN YOUR SWORD DO NOW?

PLENTY. EVEN I KNOW, THE SWORD'S BLADE DOESN'T JUST CUT--



--IT ALSO BURNS WITH CLEANSING FIRE.



THE FLIES DISPERSE. MOSTLY, THEY'RE SIMPLE INSECTS, BUZZING MADLY IN CONFUSION, BUT ONE FLY--



--ISN'T A FLY AT ALL. I JUST HAVE TO FIND--

--THERE.



WE'RE NOT DONE YET, HIVE.



I WANT THE TRUTH. WHO'S ORDERING ALL THIS? BELASCO?

BELASCO? YOU THINK BELASCO RANKS HIGHER THAN WE DO?

NO, NO, HE'S A SOLDIER AS MUCH AS WE ARE ...



WHO, THEN?

TELL ME OR I'LL--

--YOU'LL KILL US?

HMM, ACTUALLY, WE THINK YOU MAY AT THAT ...

AT LEAST TELL ME--

--DID YOU KILL STEPHEN?



YES.

OR WE MADE YOU KILL HIM.

EITHER WAY, HE HAD TO DIE.

"HAD TO" ...?

THERE'S SO MUCH YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND, MUTANT. ABOUT WHO YOU ARE ... ABOUT WHAT'S HAPPENING HERE ...

YOUR STEP-
BROTHER WAS
ASSASSINATED,
NIGHTCRAWLER.

BELASCO-- ALL
THOSE TIMES HE CAME
AFTER MARGALI AND
AMANDA-- IT WASN'T
MERELY TO GET THE
SOULSWORD, IT WAS
ALSO TO KILL YOUR
STEPMOTHER AND
SISTER.

BUT THIS
TIME...

YOU WERE
THE TARGET. KILLING
YOU WAS AS MUCH
OUR MISSION AS
FINDING AND TAKING
THE SOULSWORD
BACK TO...

NO, THAT
WOULD BE
TELLING.

THEN THESE
ATTACKS ARE...
THEY'VE ALL BEEN
RELATED?

AND THE
SCALES FALL
FROM ST. PAUL'S
EYES...

BUT STEPHEN'S
DEATH WAS... YEARS
AGO. AND WHAT
HAPPENED WITH
BELASCO--

-- WAS
YEARS AGO,
AS WELL.

THESE WHEELS
HAVE BEEN TURNING
FOR A VERY, VERY LONG
TIME, NIGHTCRAWLER.
FROM BEFORE YOU
WERE BORN.

STRATEGIES
HAVE BEEN IN
PLACE FOR...
CENTURIES.

A WAR IS
BREWING-- HAS
BEEN FOR MILLENNIA.
BATTLE LINES ARE
BEING DRAWN.

WHAT
WAR?

THE WAR
BEFORE
END-TIMES
NIGHTCRAWLER.

AND THE
OTHER SIDE HAS
BEEN STACKING
THE DECK IN ITS
FAVOR FOR
CENTURIES
NOW, COLLECTING
WEAPONS LIKE
THE SOULSWORD,
DISPATCHING
THOSE WHO WOULD
STAND IN ITS
WAY...



STEPHEN?
AMANDA AND
MARGALI?

YOU, AS WELL.
YOU MIGHT NOT BE
RELATED BY BLOOD,
BUT YOU'RE CUT
FROM THE SAME
CLOTH.



BUT W-
WHY--?

--DID WE
TELL YOU ALL
THIS NOW?

LET US ASK
YOU--WHAT IF
WE'RE LYING? OR--
WHAT IF IT DOESN'T
MATTER WHAT YOU
KNOW BECAUSE IT'S
TOO LATE? OR--
WHAT IF ...

... WHAT IF
WE DON'T WANT
OUR SIDE
TO WIN?

WHAT IF
THE THOUGHT
OF THAT
HAPPENING
SCARES
EVEN US?

WHATEVER
THE CASE, IT
DOESN'T MATTER
BECAUSE--



AARRHHHGGG!

--THIS--
THIS IS HOW A
DEMON IS KILLED
FROM AFAR,
NIGHTCRAWLER.

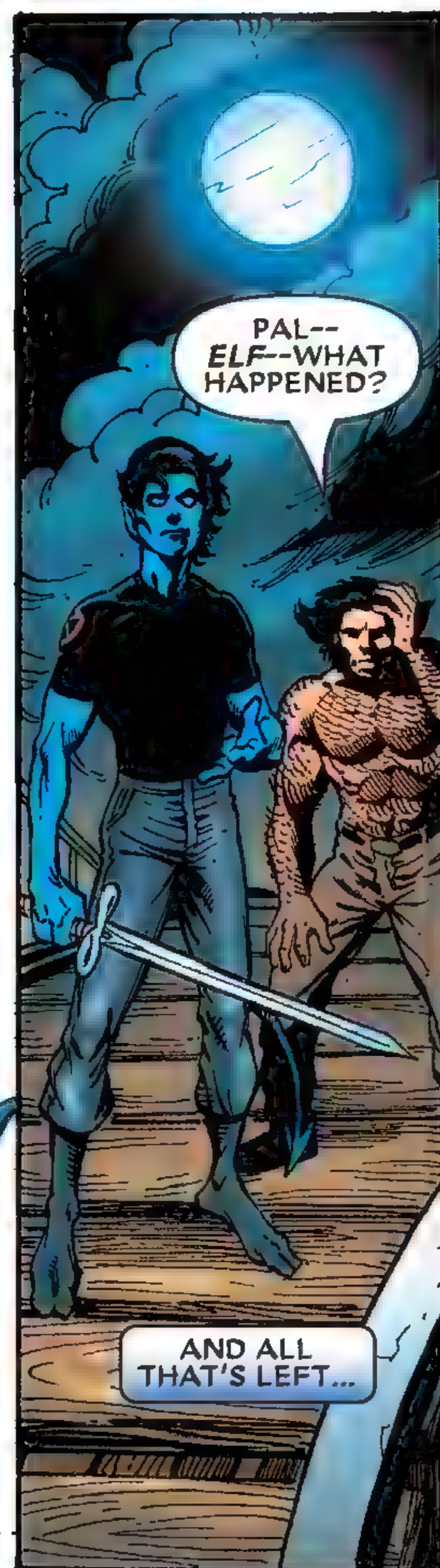
NOT
LIKE A SUN
EXPLODING.
LIKE ...



... LIKE A
FIREFLY
BLINKING
OUT--

THEN HE--IT--
THEY--ARE
GONE.

KILLED FROM AFAR--
LIKE EVERYTHING
ELSE THAT'S BEEN
HAPPENING TO ME.



PAL--
ELF--WHAT
HAPPENED?

AND ALL
THAT'S LEFT...

...ARE MORE QUESTIONS.

BAMF!

IS CHRISTINE ALL RIGHT?

YES, KURT. SHE'S...

...SHE'LL BE FINE.

AND I DON'T FEEL HIVE'S PRESENCE ANYMORE, SO... KUDOS ON THAT FRONT.

BUT, SON...THE SOULSWORD?

I'M KEEPING IT. INSIDE ME.

UNTIL...

UNTIL WHEN?

IT'S OVER, ISN'T IT? NOW THAT HIVE'S GONE AND WE'RE SAFE, IT'S--

NO, AMANDA.

I THINK...

I'M AFRAID... IT'S ONLY BEGINNING.

X NEXT: LOOSE ENDS

MARVEL

12

AGUIRRE-SACASA

ROBERTSON

RAMOS

NIGHTCRAWLER

TM



DA
RICK
05

He's your best friend and the monster that lives under your bed! And he must go where the other X-Men won't—into the shadows that have always called to him!

PREVIOUSLY

NIGHTCRAWLER

11



KURT WAGNER, a.k.a. NIGHTCRAWLER, had one heck of a week. He traveled to an old circus that he used to perform in as a youngster. He traveled with his fellow X-Man WOLVERINE and his “is-she-or-isn’t-she” girlfriend CHRISTINE PALMER. They were also joined by Kurt’s foster sister and foster mother, AMANDA SEFTON and MARGALI SZARDOS. (Amanda is the current ruler of LIMBO.)

They all joined Kurt because the demon known as NIGHTMARE was attempting to steal the mystical SOULSWORD from Limbo. The Soulsword, however, wasn’t in Limbo at all, but was magically inside Kurt!

The gang wasn’t out of the woods yet, though. The demon Hive who had been plaguing Kurt’s former circus emerged from its host and possessed Wolverine. (While under, Wolverine stabbed Christine Palmer! With help from Amanda, Christine lived.) Kurt and Wolverine fought an epic fight, but Kurt was eventually able to release Wolverine from the demon’s grasp. Hive told Nightcrawler, though, that this conflict was far from over. The war is only just beginning...

SUNDAY

NOT FAR FROM
XAVIER'S, THERE'S
A PLACE I VISIT
EVERY SO OFTEN.

ALWAYS ON A
SUNDAY, USUALLY
IN THE LATE
AFTERNOON.

THE SMALL CHAPEL
OF A HOME FOR THE
ELDERLY AND INFIRM.

WHO ALSO--LIKE THE PRIEST
SAYING MASS--HAPPEN TO BE
BLIND. A VERY SPECIFIC,
VERY SPECIAL PLACE.

I WANT
TO TALK TO
YOU TODAY
ABOUT
DOUBT...

HE'S AN ELOQUENT SPEAKER,
THIS PRIEST WHO LOST HIS
EYESIGHT IN A HUNTING
ACCIDENT WHEN HE WAS SIX.
(HE TOLD ME ONE DAY).

DOUBT IN
A WORLD IN
WHICH OUR BELIEF--
OUR FAITH--IS
SHAKEN EVERY
MOMENT OF
EVERY DAY...

HIS WORDS
CALM ME.

MONDAY

HENRY MCCOY--THE BEAST--IS XAVIER'S RESIDENT DOCTOR.

WELL, HANK?

HE'S ALSO AMONG THE INSTITUTE'S MOST... PRACTICAL, MOST CENTERED PRESENCES.

THE GOOD NEWS IS...THE BURNS YOU RECEIVED FROM MAN-THING ARE HEALED AND PROBABLY WON'T SCAR.

WHAT ABOUT THE CUTS ON MY CHEST? THE ONES I GOT FROM VERMIN?

PROBABLY WILL.

BUT I HAVE IT ON A VERY GOOD AUTHORITY THAT--

--NOW HOW DID BOBBY PUT IT?--

--"CHICKS REALLY DIG SCARS."

SOMETIMES I THINK HENRY'S TOO GOOD FOR THE REST OF US.

WE'RE ALL DISASTERS--EMOTIONALLY ARRESTED, PETTY, INSECURE--AND HE'S...

AS FOR THE REST...

ALL YOUR TESTS CAME BACK CLEAR, I'M HAPPY TO REPORT.

SO CAN I...?

PHYSICALLY, YOU'RE...WELL, NOT 100%, BUT CLOSE ENOUGH.

...HE JUST ISN'T.

♫SIGH♫ YES, KURT, YOU CAN START TRAINING AGAIN.

BUT WHY DON'T YOU GIVE IT ONE MORE DAY, ALL RIGHT?

HONESTLY, I'LL NEVER UNDERSTAND WHY EVEN THE NON-ALPHA MALES ON THE X-MEN LOVE PLAYING AT GETTING THEMSELVES KILLED.

THANK YOU, MY FRIEND...

...FOR BEARING WITH THE REST OF US.

TUESDAY

THE DANGER ROOM'S CLOSED FOR BUSINESS--

--SO LOGAN AND I DO THIS THE OLD-FASHIONED WAY.

HE'S HOLDING BACK, I CAN TELL...

...BUT IT DOESN'T BOTHER ME. CONTRARY TO WHATEVER HANK THINKS, THIS *ISN'T* ABOUT KILLING EACH OTHER.

I JUST WANT TO SWEAT. GET MY BLOOD PUMPING.

I'M TRYING TO DO THIS WITHOUT TELEPORTATION--

--SO IT'S JUST FIGHTING, MATCHING EACH OTHER, BLOW FOR BLOW.

AFTER AWHILE, IT'S ALMOST A RELIEF WHEN I HEAR A QUIET, FAMILIAR VOICE ANNOUNCE:

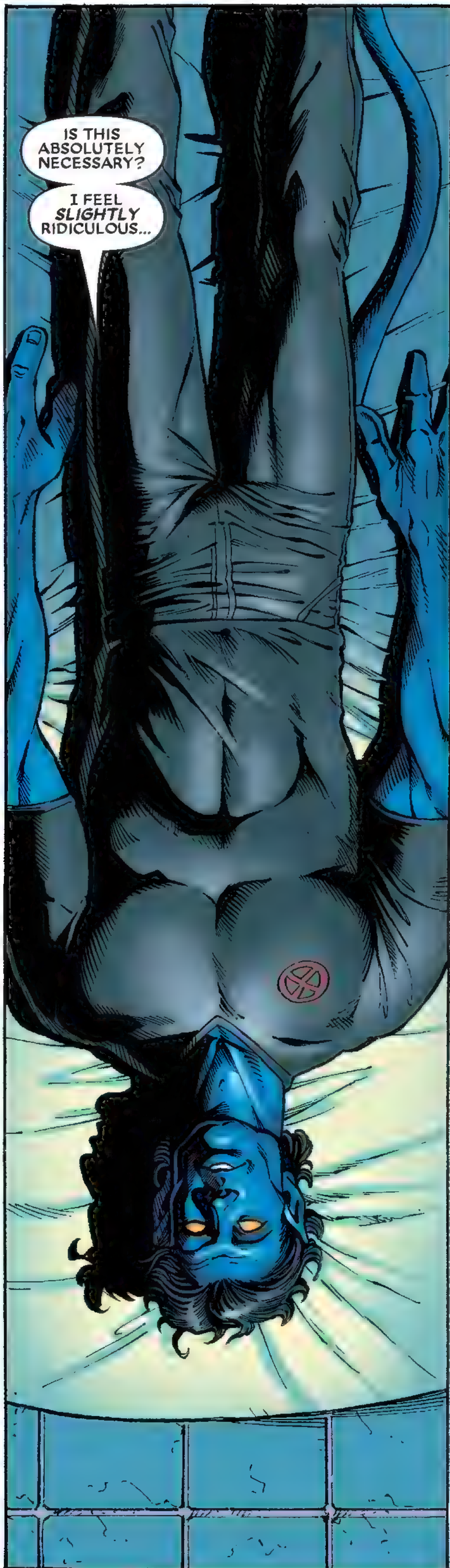
I THINK THAT'S MAYBE ENOUGH FOR TODAY...

KITTY PRYDE.

WHEN HAVE I EVER BEEN ABLE TO SAY "NO" TO YOU?

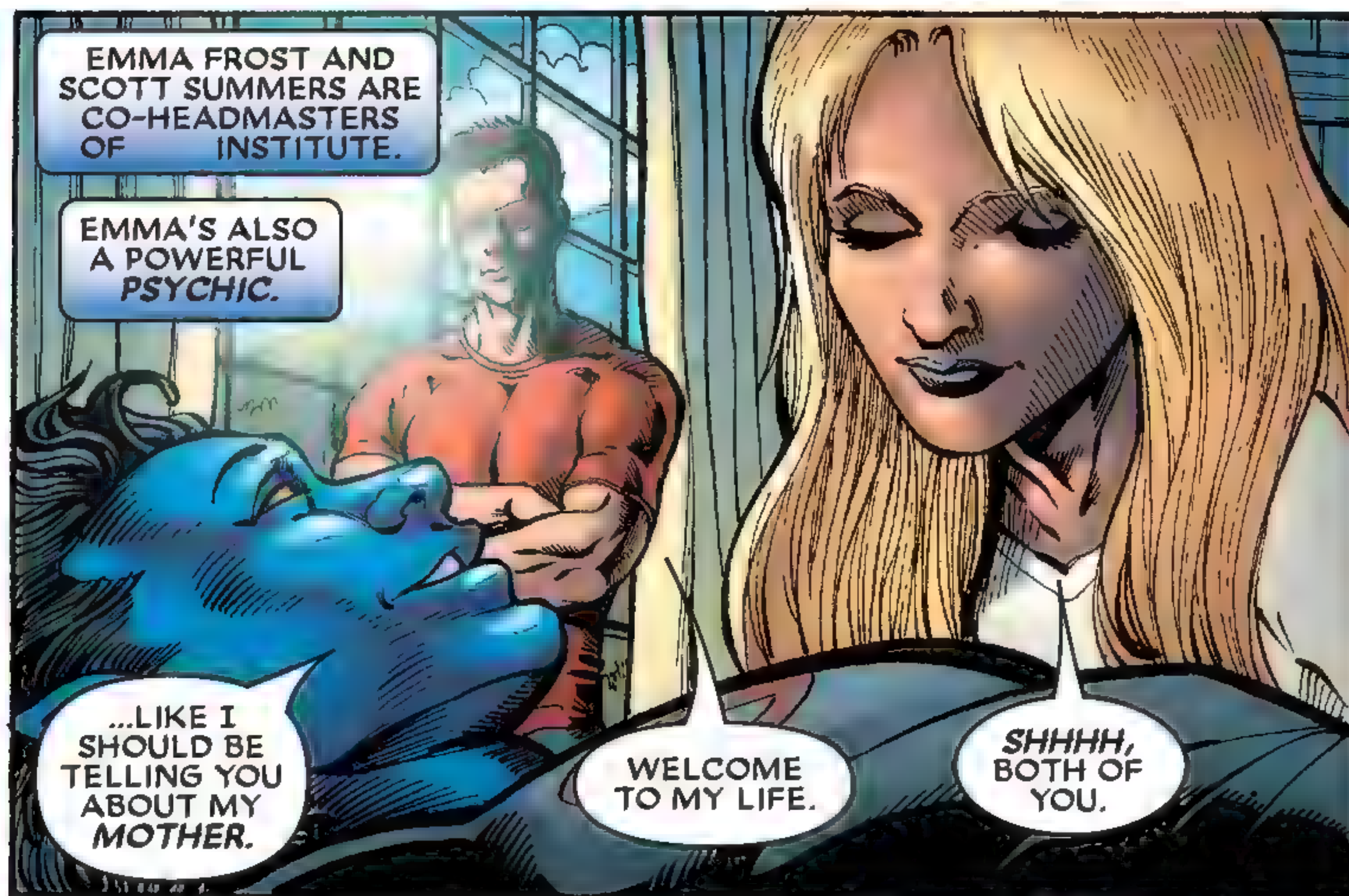
...OKAY, BOYS?

WEDNESDAY



IS THIS
ABSOLUTELY
NECESSARY?

I FEEL
SLIGHTLY
RIDICULOUS...



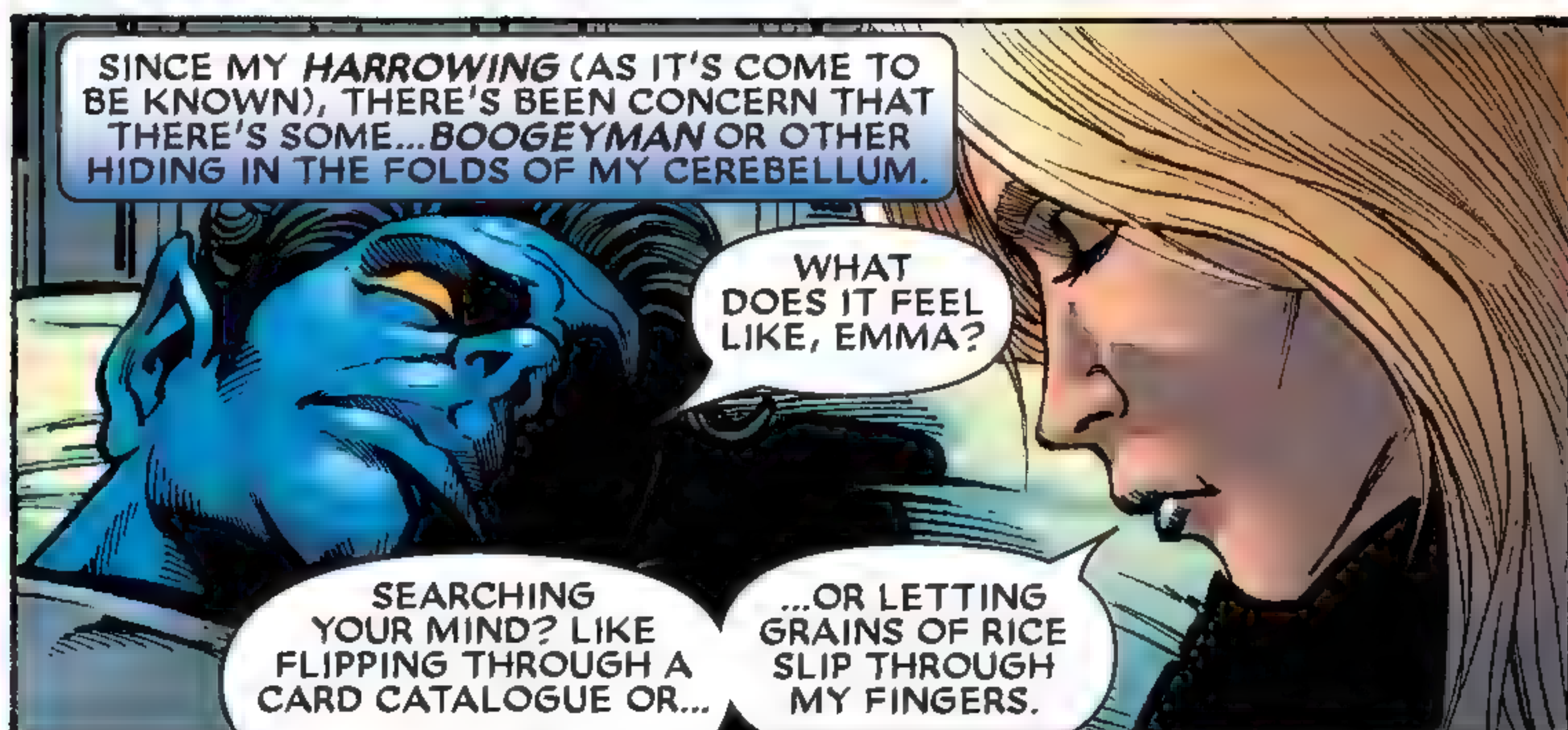
EMMA FROST AND
SCOTT SUMMERS ARE
CO-HEADMASTERS
OF INSTITUTE.

EMMA'S ALSO
A POWERFUL
PSYCHIC.

...LIKE I
SHOULD BE
TELLING YOU
ABOUT MY
MOTHER.

WELCOME
TO MY LIFE.

SHHHH,
BOTH OF
YOU.



SINCE MY *HARROWING* (AS IT'S COME TO
BE KNOWN), THERE'S BEEN CONCERN THAT
THERE'S SOME...*BOOGEYMAN* OR OTHER
HIDING IN THE FOLDS OF MY CEREBELLUM.

WHAT
DOES IT FEEL
LIKE, EMMA?

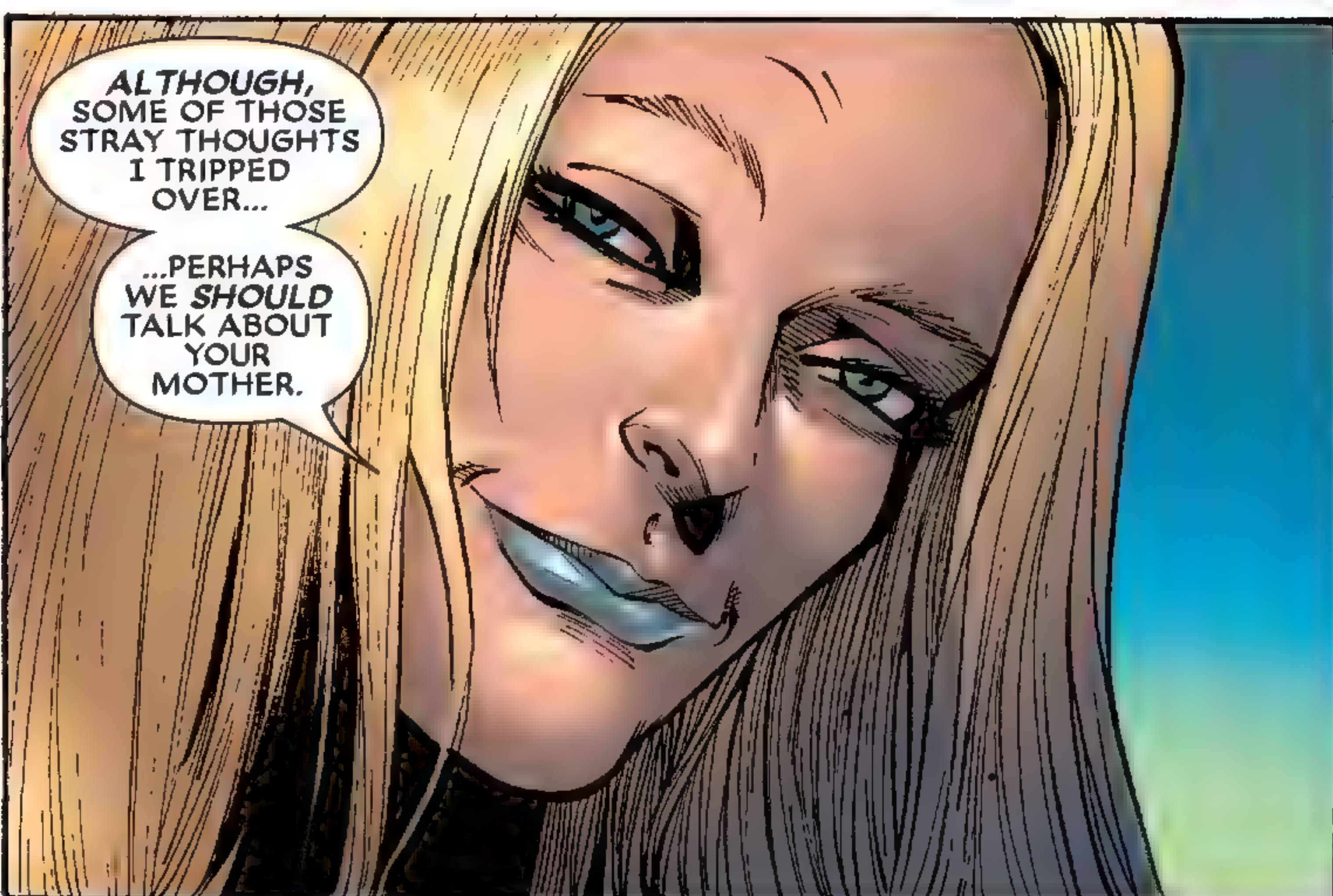
SEARCHING
YOUR MIND? LIKE
FLIPPING THROUGH A
CARD CATALOGUE OR...

...OR LETTING
GRAINS OF RICE
SLIP THROUGH
MY FINGERS.



AT ANY RATE, YOU'RE *CLEAN*. BESIDES THAT
SOULSWORD--WHICH IS ACTUALLY MAKING YOU
YOUNGER, I THINK--THERE AREN'T ANY FOREIGN
BODIES IN YOUR...CORPOREAL SELF.

I
DIDN'T
THINK
SO.

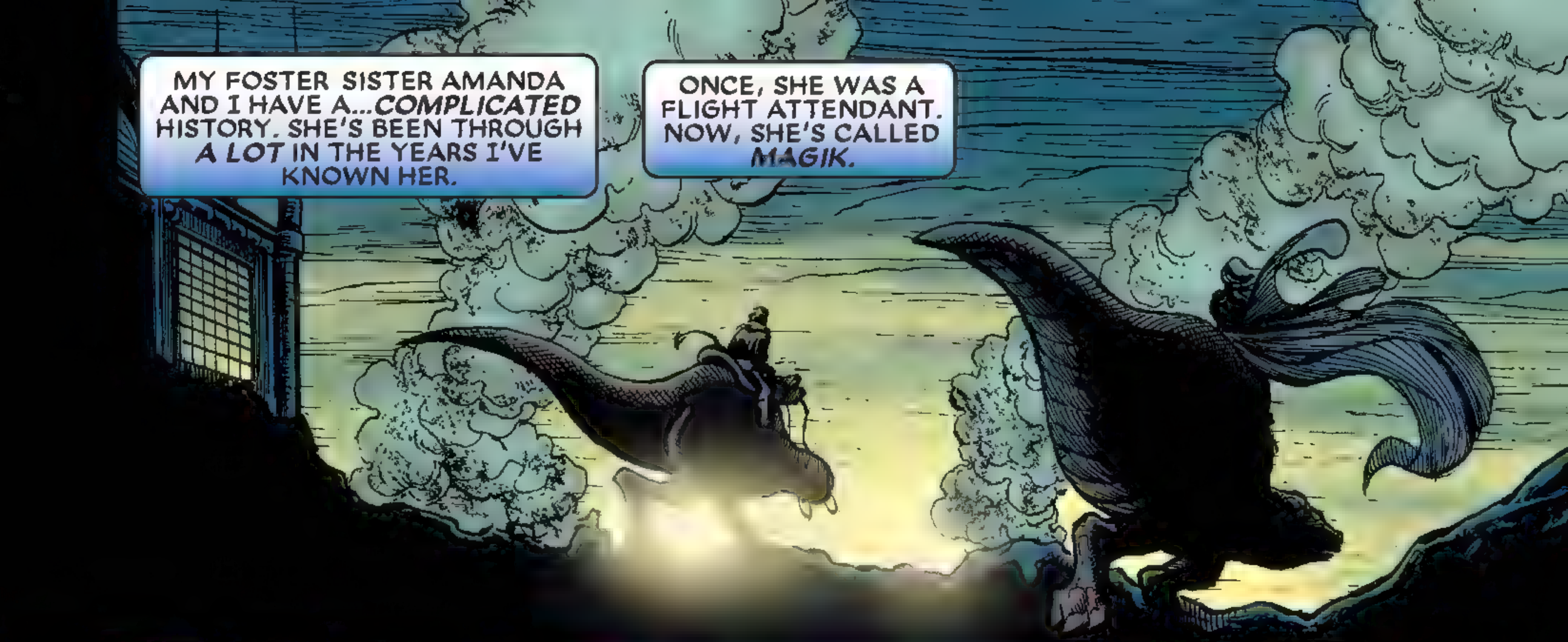


ALTHOUGH,
SOME OF THOSE
STRAY THOUGHTS
I TRIPPED
OVER...

...PERHAPS
WE SHOULD
TALK ABOUT
YOUR
MOTHER.

MY FOSTER SISTER AMANDA AND I HAVE A...**COMPLICATED** HISTORY. SHE'S BEEN THROUGH A LOT IN THE YEARS I'VE KNOWN HER.

ONCE, SHE WAS A FLIGHT ATTENDANT. NOW, SHE'S CALLED **MAGIK**.



...INCLUDING LIMBO, THERE ARE **SEVERAL** SO-CALLED NETHER-REALMS, KURT.

THE LAND OF THE DEAD. THE LAND OF DREAMS, HEAVEN, HELL, AND...

YES?

...OTHERS YOU **DON'T** WANT TO KNOW ABOUT.



WHEN HIVE WAS GOING AFTER THE SOULSWORD, I FELT--AND **NIGHTMARE** FELT--DISTURBANCES SPREADING ACROSS LIMBO.

CRACKS AND **FISSURES** IN THE WALLS SEPARATING IT FROM THE **OTHER** MYSTICAL TERRITORIES.

HOW **BAD** IS THAT? HOW **SERIOUS**?

EXTREMELY.

NIGHTMARE SAYS HE'S SEEN **CROSSOVERS**--SOULS FROM HEAVEN AND HELL--PASSING THROUGH **HIS** KINGDOM.

THE **LAND OF DREAM**?



YES, AND IF HE'S **SPEAKING TRUE**--

--IF THE **NUMINOUS BOUNDARIES** ARE BREAKING DOWN--

--WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE **NETHER-REALMS** **COULD** START AFFECTING THE EARTH.

THE...?

YOUR EARTH, KURT.



THURSDAY

THE LAST FEW DAYS, I'VE BEEN KEEPING TO MYSELF. HEADING UP TO MY ROOM RIGHT AFTER DINNER.

READING. GETTING CAUGHT UP ON MY JOURNAL.

THINKING.

BZZZ
BZZZ

HELLO?

KURT, IT'S SCOTT. I'VE BEEN GOING OVER THESE LATEST REPORTS OF YOURS AND I HAVE A QUESTION OR TWO.

WOULD YOU MIND COMING DOWN TO THE LIBRARY? I KNOW IT'S LATE...

~SIGH~ SOME THINGS AREN'T WORTH FIGHTING AGAINST...

OF COURSE, SCOTT. I'LL BE RIGHT THERE.

I'M TEMPTED TO BEG OFF, BUT THEN I NOTICE THE DATE.

APPROACHING THE LIBRARY'S EVER-SO-SLIGHTLY OPEN DOOR, I TELL MYSELF I HAVE TO ACT--

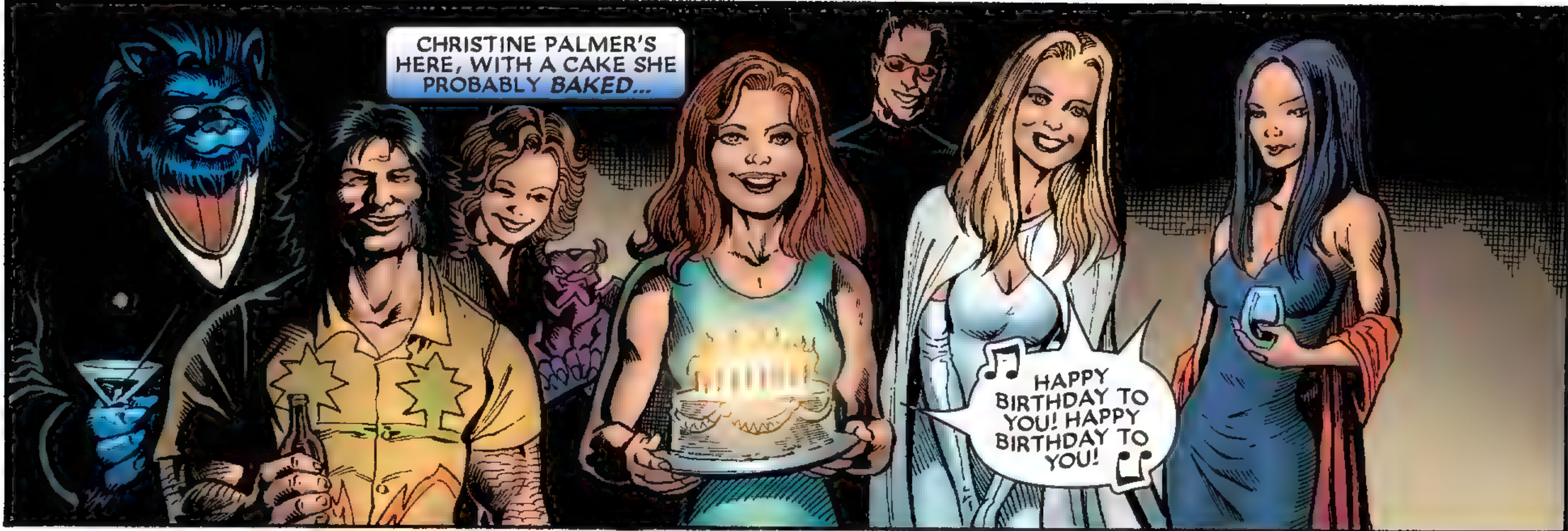


SURPRISE!

HAPPY BIRTHDAY KURT!

ROBERTO AGUIRRE-SACASA | DARICK ROBERTSON | RODNEY RAMOS | AVALON'S MATT MILLA | VC'S RUS WOOTON
WRITER PENCILER INKER COLORIST LETTERER

SEAN RYAN ASST. EDITOR NICK LOWE ASSOC. EDITOR MIKE MARTS EDITOR JOE QUESADA EDITOR IN CHIEF DAN BUCKLEY PUBLISHER



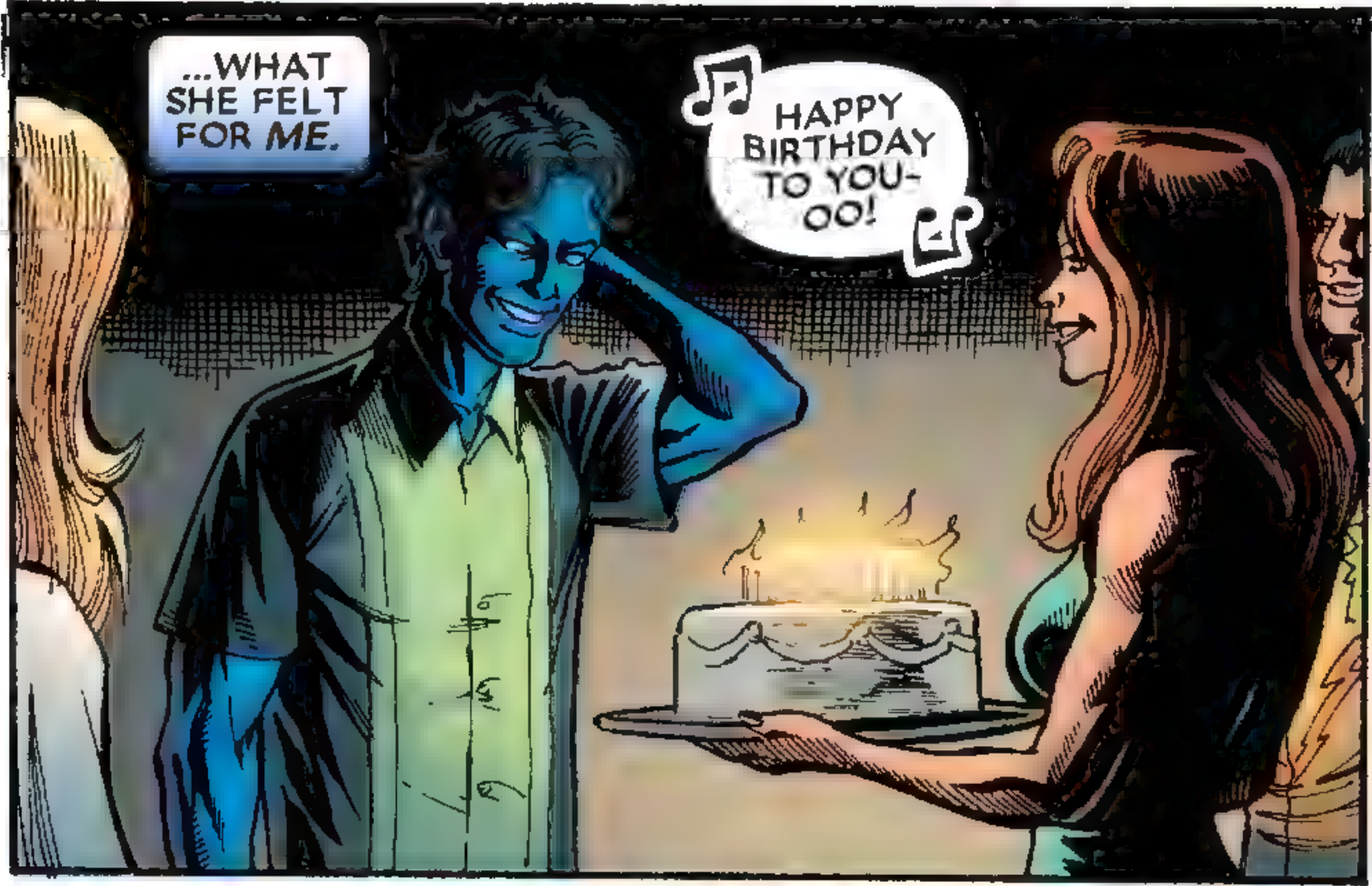
CHRISTINE PALMER'S
HERE, WITH A CAKE SHE
PROBABLY BAKED...

HAPPY
BIRTHDAY TO
YOU! HAPPY
BIRTHDAY TO
YOU!



SEEING HER, I WONDER
WHY I STOPPED MYSELF
FROM FEELING FOR HER...

HAPPY
BIRTHDAY,
DEAR
KU-URT!



...WHAT
SHE FELT
FOR ME.

HAPPY
BIRTHDAY
TO YOU-
OO!



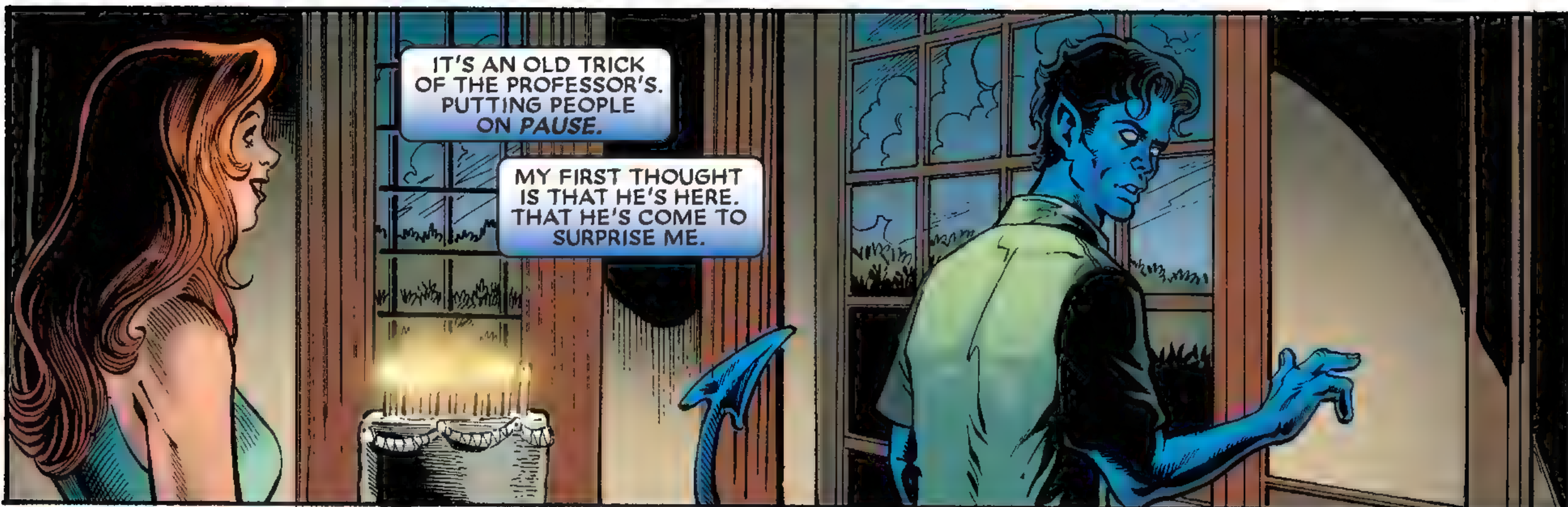
BLOW OUT
THE CANDLES,
SEXY. MAKE
A WISH.

I DRAW IN
A BREATH--



--AND ALL
AROUND ME--

--EVERYTHING
GOES STILL.
FREEZES.



IT'S AN OLD TRICK
OF THE PROFESSOR'S.
PUTTING PEOPLE
ON PAUSE.

MY FIRST THOUGHT
IS THAT HE'S HERE.
THAT HE'S COME TO
SURPRISE ME.



BUT THEN I FEEL
HOW COLD IT'S
GOTTEN SUDDENLY.



I HEAR SOMETHING
SHUFFLING
DOWNSTAIRS, IN ONE
OF THE PARLORS.



I'M THINKING BACK
TO ONE OF MY
BIRTHDAYS PAST.

THE ONE I SPENT
TRAPPED IN AN
INFERNO, FIGHTING
FOR MY SOUL.

NOT. FUN.



IF IT WERE AN ENEMY,
THE INSTITUTE'S
DEFENSE SYSTEMS
WOULD HAVE GONE
OFF.



STILL. IF I'VE GOT
THE SOULSWORD...

HELLO?

YOU CAN
PUT THAT AWAY
NIGHTCRAWLER

TRULY, I
AM NOT HERE
TO FIGHT



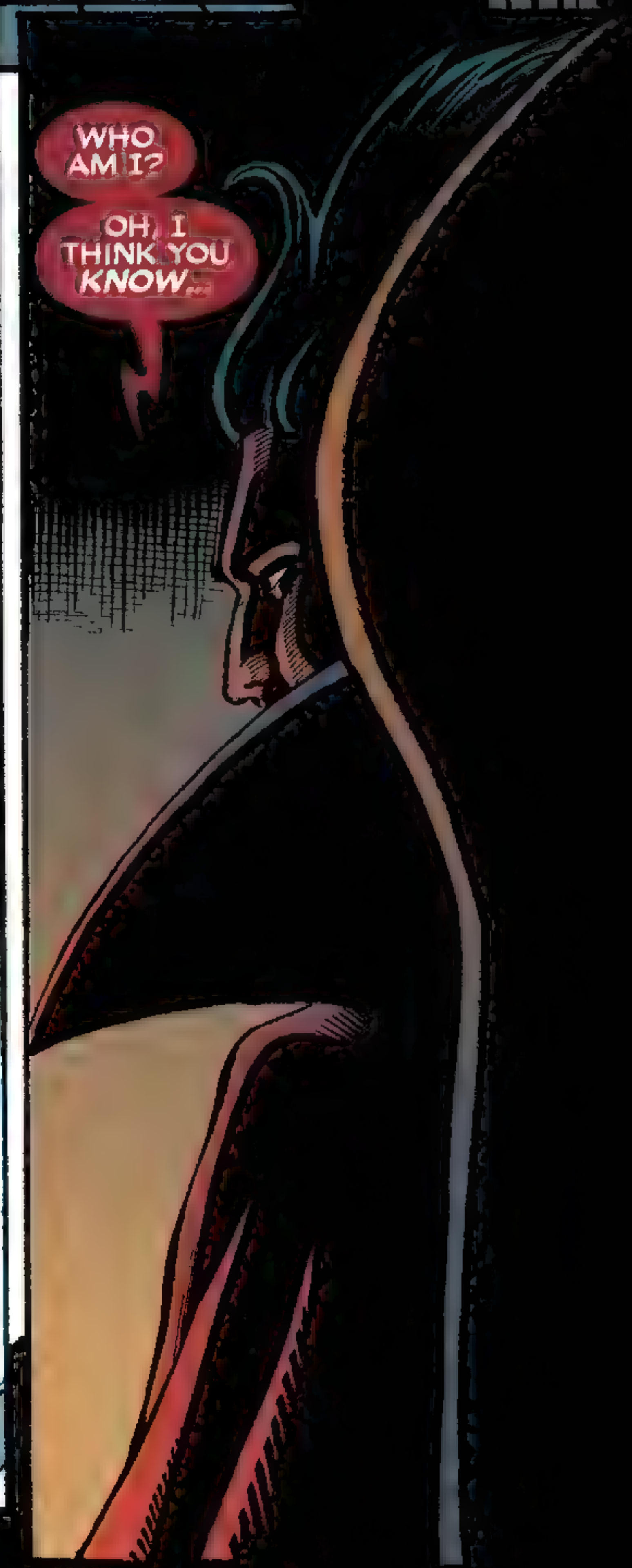
AND, UNLIKE
MY COUSIN *HIVE*,
I'M NOT INTERESTED
IN TAKING THE
SWORD FROM
YOU

DISTANT,
DISTANT COUSIN
BY THE WAY,
SEVERAL TIMES
REMOVED



WHO--

--WHO ARE
YOU?



WHO
AM I?

OH, I
THINK YOU
KNOW



...
MEPHISTOPHELES.

PLEASE--
NO NEED TO
STAND ON
CEREMONY

MEPHISTO.

I WAS GOING
TO PICK YOU UP A
GIFT ON THE WAY,
BUT THE NEAREST
MALL CLOSED
HOURS AGO.







I KNOW BETTER THAN TO SAY THAT'S IMPOSSIBLE, BUT...

...AT WHAT COST, MEPHISTO?

HA. VERY GOOD, NIGHTCRAWLER.

THESE THINGS ALWAYS COME AT A PRICE, DON'T THEY?

SHALL WE WALK? TAKE IN SOME OF THIS CRISP NIGHT AIR?



WE DO. AND I BITE MY TONGUE. AND MY SKIN CRAWLS. AND THE GRASS LITERALLY WITHERS BENEATH MEPHISTO'S FEET.

THEN, FINALLY--

--HE STARTS DEALING.



WHAT HAVE YOU TOLD YOU...

(THAT'S NOT HIS REAL NAME, INCIDENTALLY. HIS REAL NAME'S HALPHAS, BUT LET THAT PASS.)

ABOUT THE END TIMES? BEFORE HIS UNTIMELY DEATH? HAVE WASN'T LYING, YOU KNOW.

THE UNHOLY WARS ARE ALMOST UPON THE EARTH, NIGHTCRAWLER.

MY STEPSISTER AND MOTHER HAVE SAID AS MUCH... THAT THEY'VE FELT CELESTIAL AND INFERNAL SHIFTS TAKING PLACE. LIKE... TREMORS BEFORE AN EARTHQUAKE.

NOT JUST THEM. YOU, AS WELL.

AND MORE THAN FELT THEM-- YOU'VE FOUGHT THEM.

I HAVE?

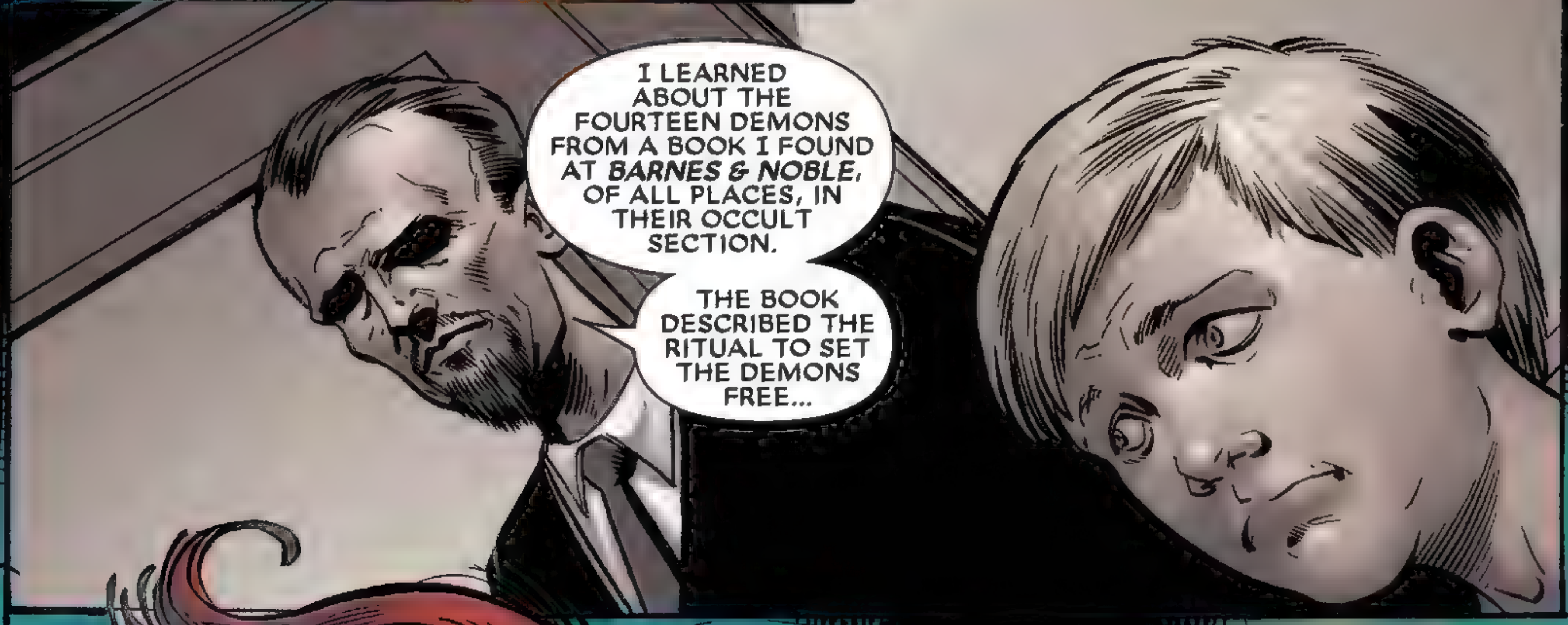


WHAT DO YOU MEAN, MEPHISTO?
HANDS OFF, BY THE WAY.

THAT ENCOUNTER YOU HAD WITH THE DEMON PAZUZU? WITH THE COVEN THAT WAS TRYING TO FREE PAZUZU AND HIS THIRTEEN BROTHERS?



YOU NEVER FOUND OUT WHAT LOUIS CHILDS, THE CULT'S RINGLEADER, SAID TO ONE OF THE SACRIFICIAL CHILDREN--
--DID YOU?



I LEARNED ABOUT THE FOURTEEN DEMONS FROM A BOOK I FOUND AT BARNES & NOBLE, OF ALL PLACES, IN THEIR OCCULT SECTION.
THE BOOK DESCRIBED THE RITUAL TO SET THE DEMONS FREE...



IRONICALLY, CHILDS HAD NEVER SET FOOT IN THAT PARTICULAR BOOKSTORE BEFORE.
COINCIDENCE?
NO... YOU KNOW BETTER, NIGHTCRAWLER.

SO--WHAT? SOMEONE MADE CHILDS GO INTO THAT STORE AND "ACCIDENTALLY" FIND THE RITUAL?

SUGGESTED IT STRONGLY. LET'S SAY, TO GET CHILDS TO FREE THE FOURTEEN DEMONS WHO WOULD HAVE BEEN THE SIDE OF DARKNESS'S FIRST LINE OF ATTACK. ITS VANGUARD.

THIS IS *INSANE*. A SUPERNATURAL CONSPIRACY? GOING BACK TO...TO...

...WAIT, WHAT ABOUT THE GHOSTS HAUNTING THE SUBWAY?

WERE THEY MEANT TO BE A PART OF THIS WAR, TOO?

NO, NO, THEY WERE MERE... OPPORTUNISTS.

THE MEMBRANES BETWEEN WORLDS ARE WEAKENING-- BECOMING POROUS--AND THINGS ARE STARTING TO GET THROUGH. THINGS LIKE...

...THE SPIRITS OF THE RESTLESS DEAD.

AND I WAS THERE TO STOP THEM, AS WELL. ANOTHER... "COINCIDENCE"?

HARDLY.

IN BOTH CASES, YOU WERE ASKED TO HELP--

BY STORM, ONE OF MY FELLOW X-MEN, YES.

AND FROM WHOM, DO YOU SUPPOSE, DID STORM GET THE IDEA THAT YOU WOULD BE THE PERFECT PERSON TO INVESTIGATE THESE INCIDENTS OF THE SUPERNATURAL?

THAT THE X-MEN SHOULD BE INVOLVED AT ALL?

I...
I ACTUALLY DON'T KNOW.

I WON'T UTTER ANY OF THEIR NAMES ALOUD, BUT LET'S JUST SAY THAT THE SO-CALLED "FORCES OF GOOD" CAN BE AS MANIPULATIVE AND SELF-SERVING AS THE "FORCES OF EVIL."

APPALLING. ISN'T IT? THAT YOU'VE BEEN DOING THEIR DIRTY WORK AND WERE GIVEN NO CHOICE IN THE MATTER.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF TELLING ME ALL THIS, MEPHISTO? IF I REALLY DON'T HAVE A CHOICE?

AH, BUT YOU DO, I'M GIVING YOU ONE, NIGHTCRAWLER.

AND ALL YOU HAVE TO DO IS... NOTHING.

WHEN THE WAR BEGINS IN EARNEST, WHEN THE TRUMPETS SOUND, WHEN THE WALLS COME TUMBLING DOWN, WHEN THE GREAT LEVIATHAN CRAWLS OUT OF THE WATER...

ALL YOU NEED DO IS STAND ASIDE.





THERE'S NO CHANCE YOU'D CONSIDER DEFECTING TO OUR SIDE, BUT BEING A CONSCIENTIOUS OBJECTOR--

IN EXCHANGE FOR WHAT?

IF I DON'T PARTICIPATE, WHAT DO YOU GIVE ME? DO FOR ME?



SPARE YOUR LOVED ONES, YOUR FAMILY AND FRIENDS, MAKE SURE THEY ESCAPE THE SLAUGHTER. PROTECT THEM IN A WAY ONLY SOMEONE ON THE *INSIDE* WOULD BE ABLE TO.

THAT, AND...

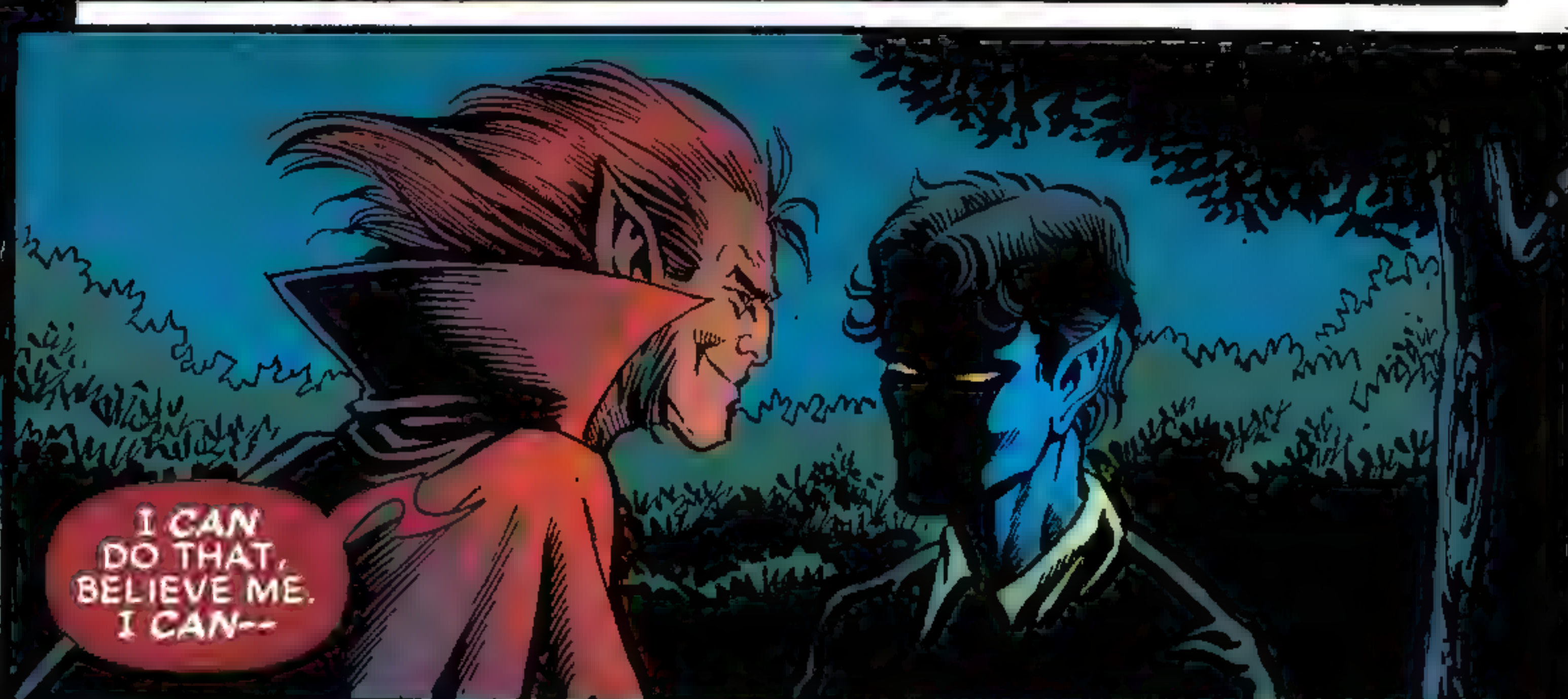


WHAT?

WHAT, MEPHISTO?

I'LL BRING YOUR BROTHER BACK TO LIFE, NIGHTCRAWLER. I'LL MAKE HIM HOW HE WAS BEFORE HIS SOUL BECAME CORRUPTED AND HE MURDERED THOSE CHILDREN.

I'LL GRANT YOU, IN OTHER WORDS...YOUR GREATEST WISH.



I CAN DO THAT, BELIEVE ME. I CAN--



SMACKKK!



MY...

I'M BACK. AND TIME'S UNFROZEN. AND I WANT TO TELL MYSELF I JUST **IMAGINED** THE LAST TEN MINUTES, BUT...

...I KNOW BETTER.

COME ON, KURT, THE WAX IS DRIPPING ALL OVER YOUR CAKE.

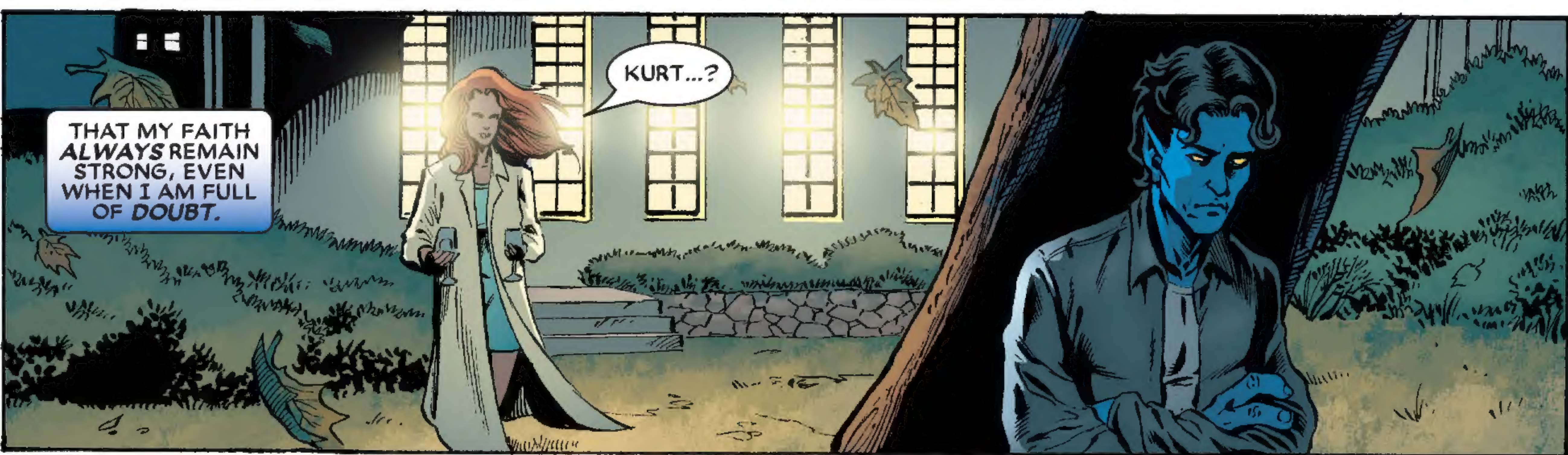
I TAKE ANOTHER BREATH THEN, AND SAY A PRAYER.

THAT WHEREVER MY BROTHER IS, HE'S AT PEACE.

THAT HE STAY THAT WAY.

THAT WHEN THE **TRUMPETS** SOUND--
WHEN THE **WALLS** COME DOWN--WHEN **LEVIATHAN** EMERGES FROM THE SEA--

--I AM STRONG.



THAT MY FAITH ALWAYS REMAIN STRONG, EVEN WHEN I AM FULL OF DOUBT.

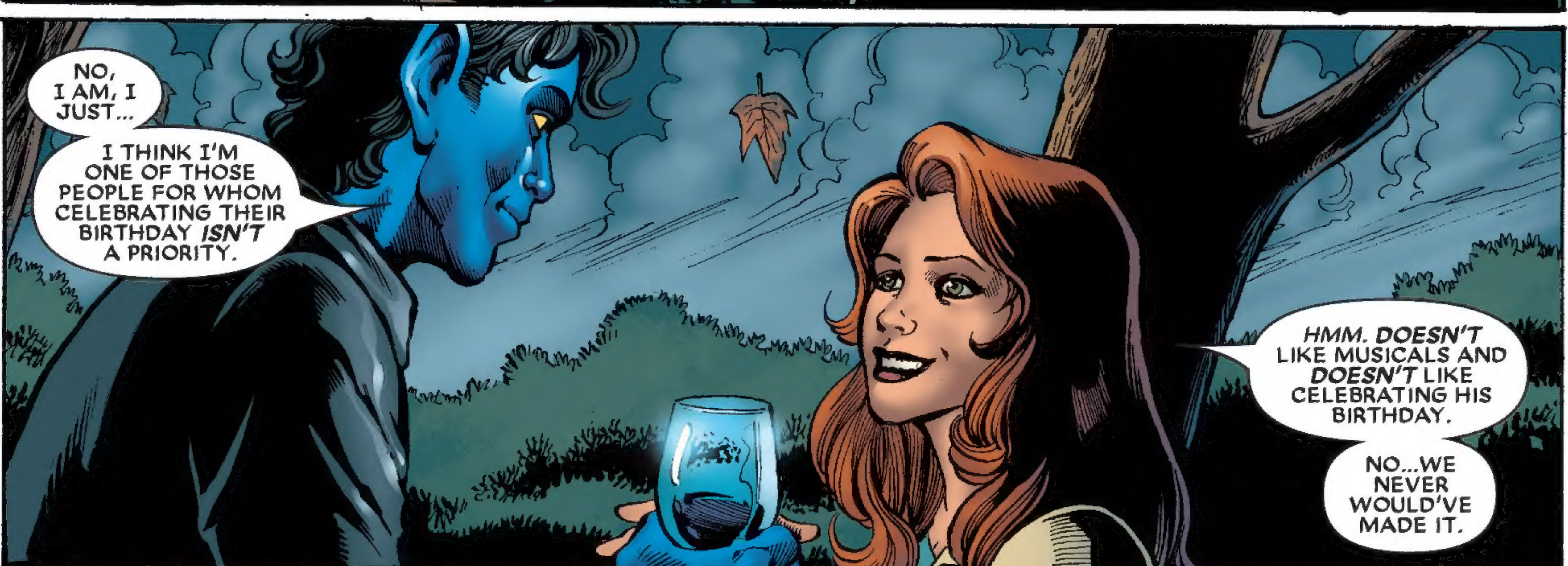
KURT...?



HERE, CHRISTINE.

HI...

WHAT ARE YOU DOING OUTSIDE? AREN'T YOU ENJOYING YOUR PARTY?

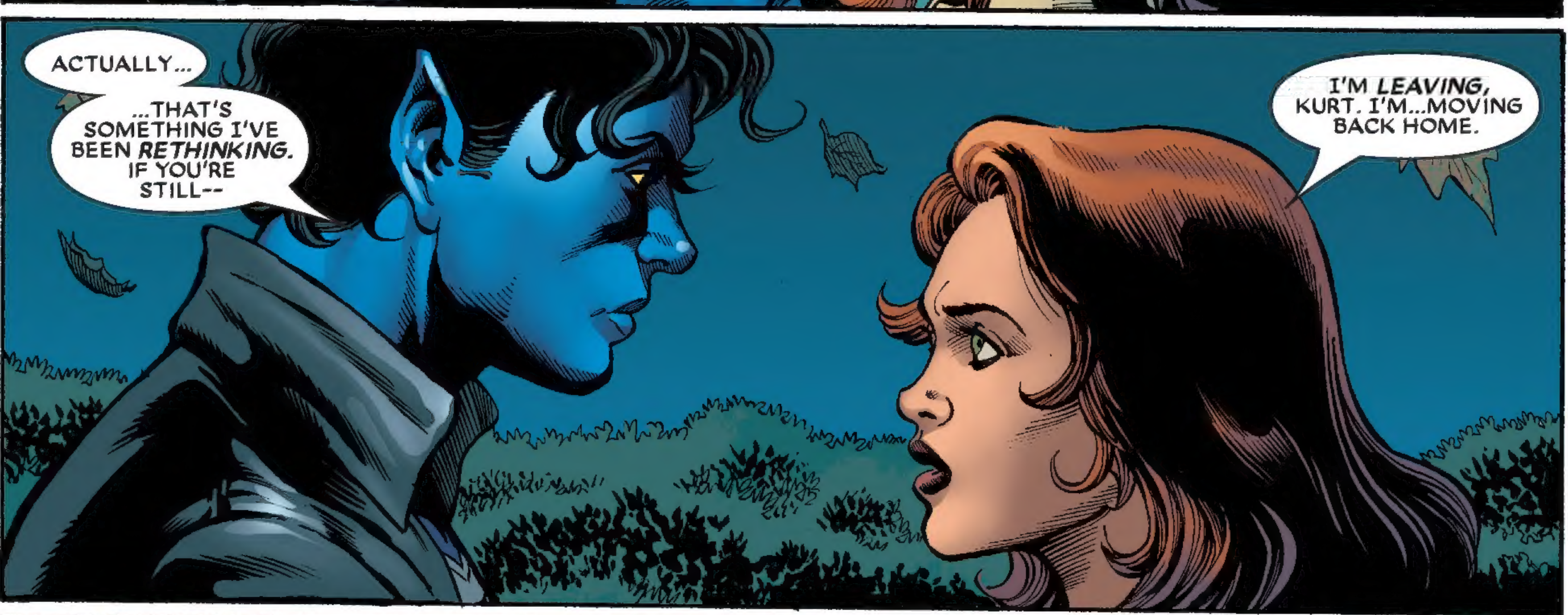


NO, I AM, I JUST...

I THINK I'M ONE OF THOSE PEOPLE FOR WHOM CELEBRATING THEIR BIRTHDAY *ISN'T* A PRIORITY.

HMM. DOESN'T LIKE MUSICALS AND DOESN'T LIKE CELEBRATING HIS BIRTHDAY.

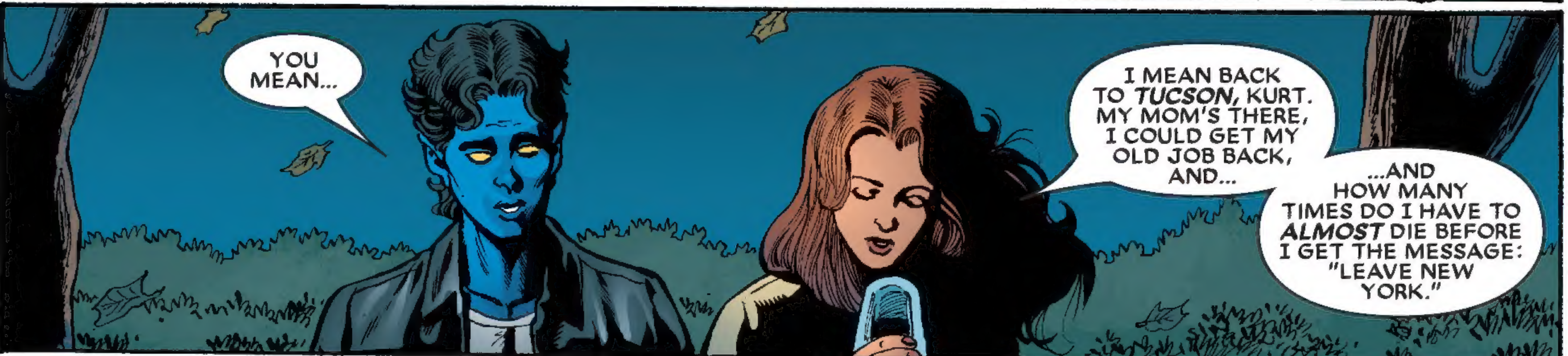
NO...WE NEVER WOULD'VE MADE IT.



ACTUALLY...

...THAT'S SOMETHING I'VE BEEN *RETHINKING*. IF YOU'RE STILL--

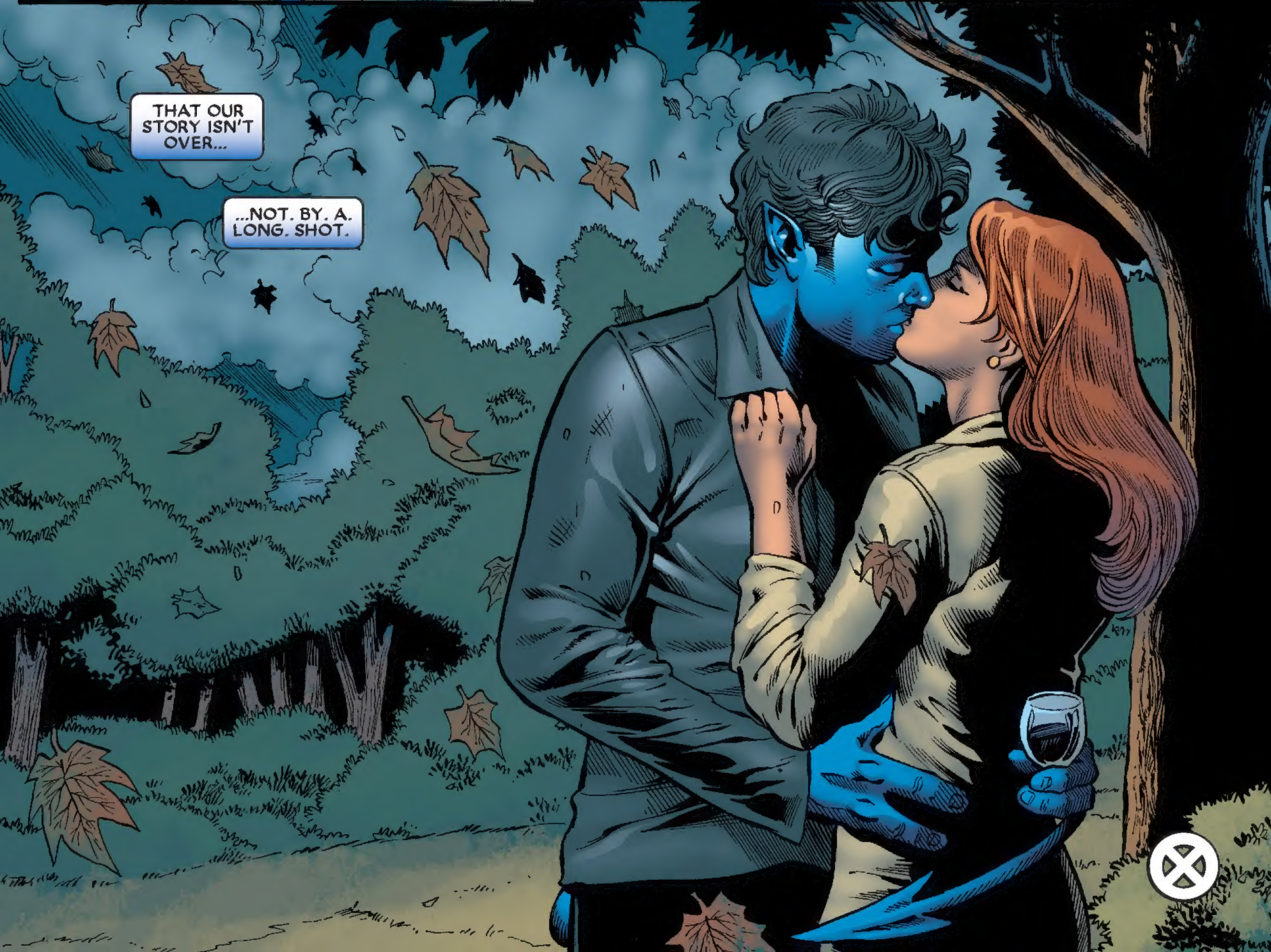
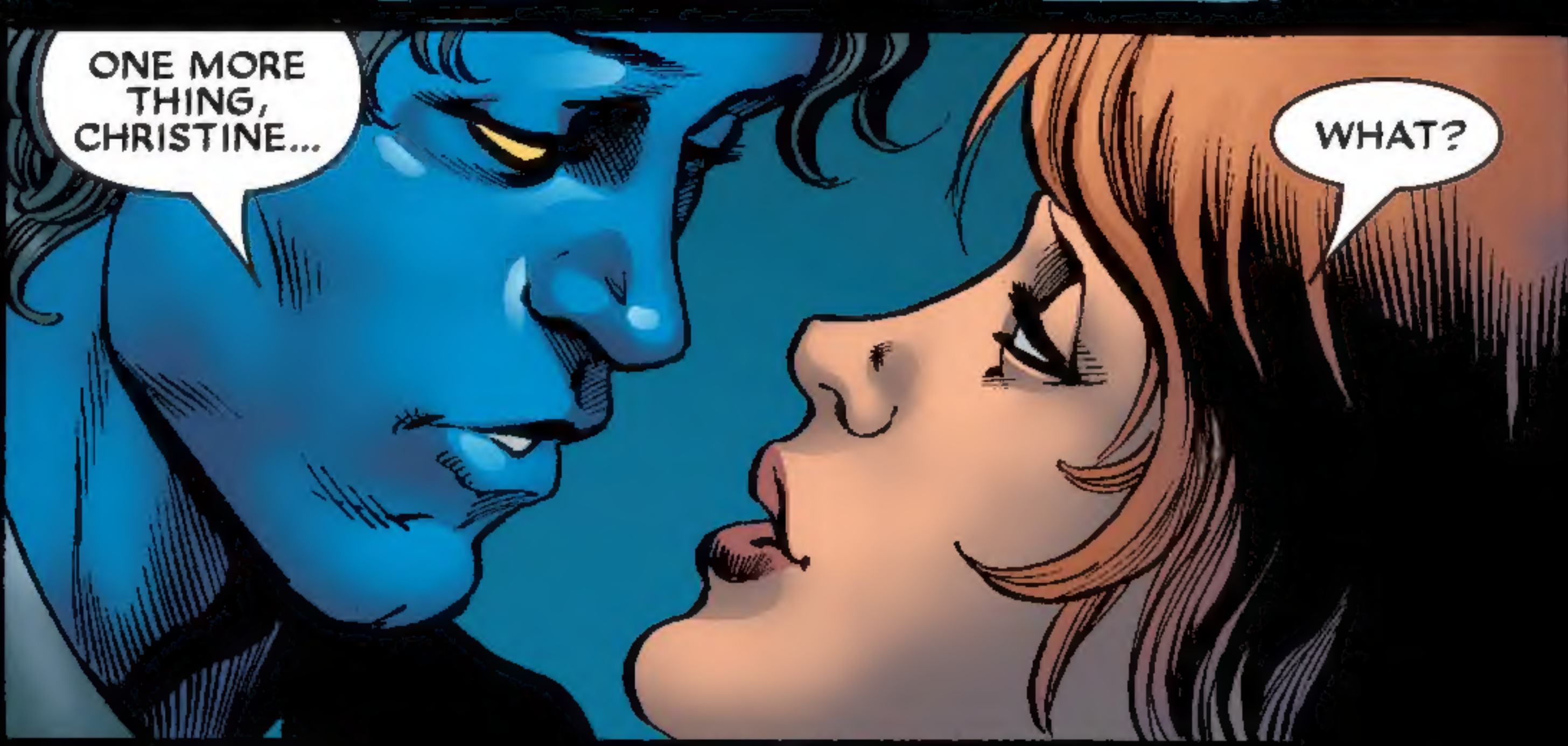
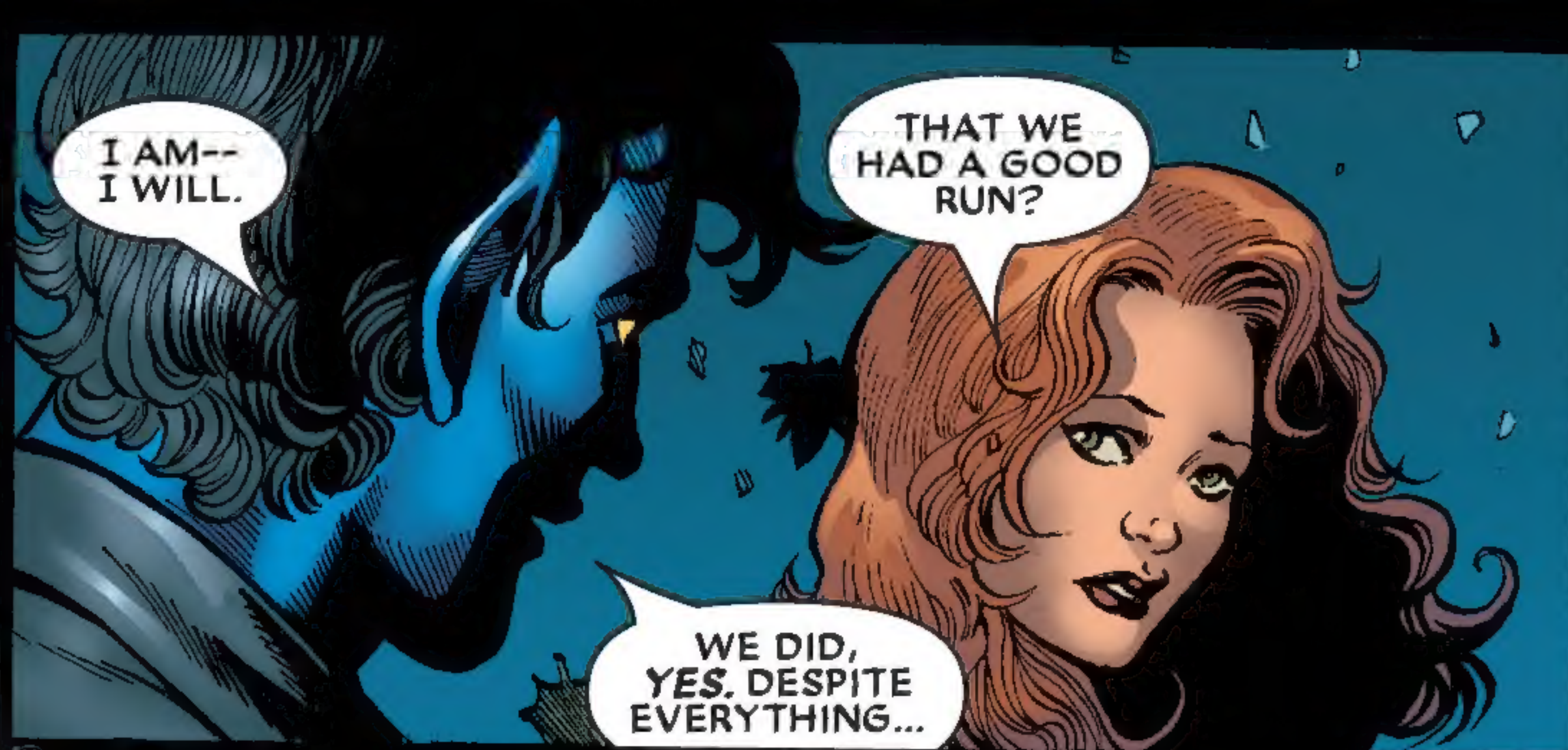
I'M LEAVING, KURT. I'M...MOVING BACK HOME.



YOU MEAN...

I MEAN BACK TO TUCSON, KURT. MY MOM'S THERE, I COULD GET MY OLD JOB BACK, AND...

...AND HOW MANY TIMES DO I HAVE TO ALMOST DIE BEFORE I GET THE MESSAGE: "LEAVE NEW YORK."



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